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MY GARDEN

A HAMLET IN OLD HAMPSHIRE

BY

ANNA LEA MERRITT

WITH 22 ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO. LTD
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, CHARING CROSS ROAD
1902

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TO

CECILIA MACRAE

THIS PICTURE OF A PLACE SHE LOVES

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

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THE BEGINNING

THE NEW HOME

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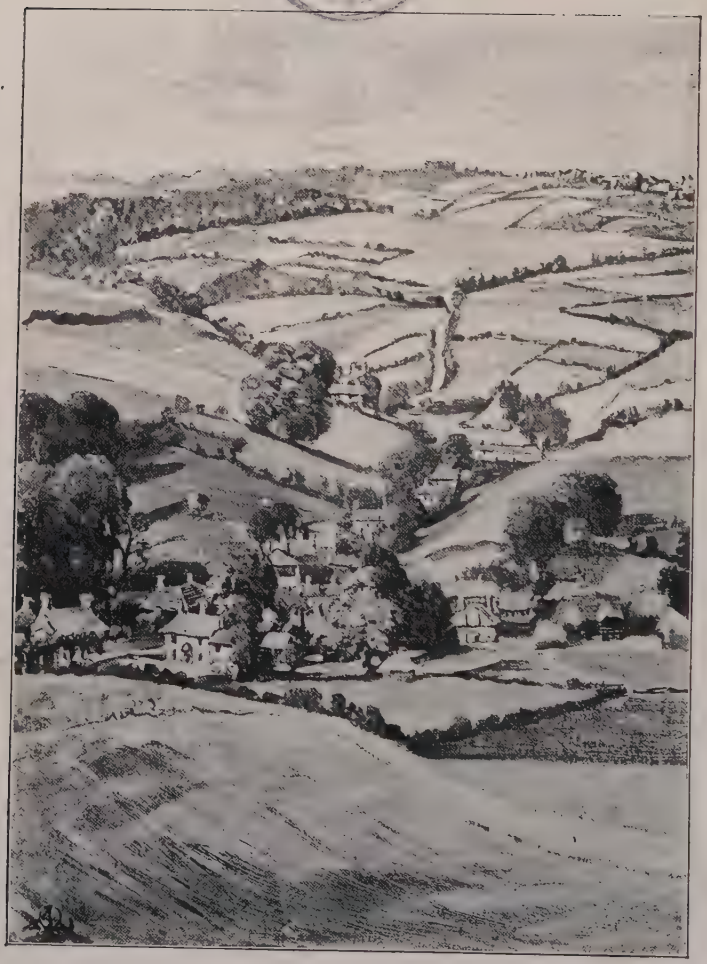

Art Repro. Co., ph., sc. The Village and Beyond.

A HAMLET IN OLD HAMPSHIRE

THE BEGINNING

THE NEW HOME

T was a Sunday in June, a day of the brightest sunshine, when they brought me from London to my country home.

Two joyous young people, high on full tide of love, happiness, and hope, bore me and my fragile one-oared craft on their dancing wave, lifted me into this eddy or backwater of tranquil peace.

Only one day could they pause with me, and yet, ever since, the garden and cottage are filled with the fragrance of their affection.

Always when I cross the little lawn, in

the sheltered end of the garden enclosure, they appear to me again. We lie on the deep grass, they crowning each other with buttercups, resting in this peaceful nest while chaffinches, disturbed in their long possession, call out: "What are you doing here? what are you doing here?" "Room enough for two, room enough for two," I reply. Robins and thrushes greeted us also, but only the chaffinch remonstrated against our intrusion.

Beyond the high garden wall, in a grove of lofty elms, a hundred rooks were busy with their broods. They circled above the lofty tree-tops, calling encouragingly to their young ones, coming and going for their food. Too busy, they, to notice us! Indeed they thought the world was all for them.

Strange happiness and peace grew up in this rustic abode. I came to it when all my happiness seemed lost. Health with its power for work and enjoyment, companionship of the dear young sister who had filled my house with gladness, and treasures laid up in earthly places were all taken from me.

Friends thought me ruined in health, and banished to a desolate solitude; but here the peace of Divine love surrounded me, and the possession of the whole universe was given in exchange for worthless securities.

"My birds, my trees, my sunshine," I cried, and pressed my heart against the warm earth, sharing the universal joy of summer life.

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THE VILLAGE AND THE PEOPLE

CHAPTER I

THE VILLAGE AND THE PEOPLE

IN these days, crowded with topics of great importance, an apology is due for offering drowsy gossip from the sleepiest of little villages. Drowsiness and dullness have refreshed me and become an atmosphere necessary to a soul somewhat tired. This description of rustic life may be an anodyne—a sort of rest cure to those who read it in the bustle of a larger world. Some inhabitants of New Hampshire, if they come across these pages, may the better appreciate the advantage of the new over the old, and yet understand why this Hampshire was so endeared to their forefathers that her name was transplanted to their hills of New England. For hundreds of years life here has continued almost unchanged. The outward face of this hamlet,

the houses, fields and woods, the flocks and herds, and crops are what they were two hundred years ago.

Here I came to live, winter and summer, after many years spent in the rushing life of the greatest city. Intense contrast emphasised this charmed repose, this rustic peace. I long to talk about it, but there is no one here who could sympathise. Sometimes in winter there are long silent months, with long lamp-lit evenings, when the impulse to laugh or talk to express my happiness and peace can find no outlet unless in writing. Please excuse it.

One who is transplanted from London to a tiny hamlet of some fifty scattered farms and cottages revels, overmuch perhaps, in freedom from burdensome formalities. What delight to step out of doors without preparation; to run up the hill, if the morning entice, to pick a handful of hedge-roses for the breakfast table; and to know that, even on the highroad, one may only meet a flock of sheep coming down to be watered, or perhaps the village herd taking their leisurely way up to

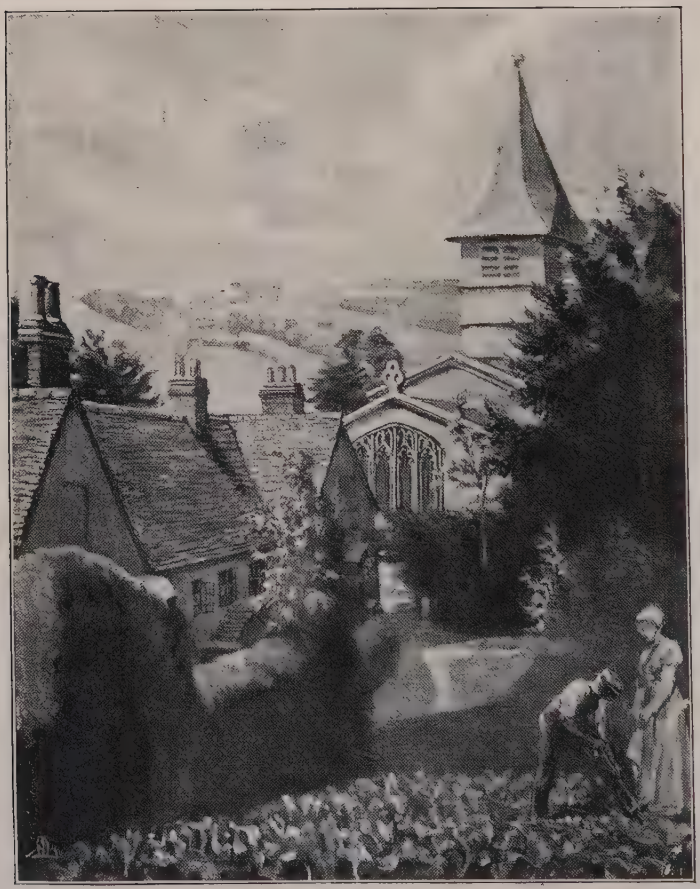
the common pasture, high on the breezy down.

My cottage is quite on the edge of the village, divided from the highroad by only narrow flowerbeds, set in deep box edgings, and by a row of pollard limes. Its next neighbours are beyond a large enclosed garden, and its eyes, looking straight across the road towards the sunrise, behold an opening valley with distant farms set among noble trees and the long ridge of the great downs, rising to a vast height. In the valley bottom is pasture, corn grows on the hillside almost to the hanger of woodland on its summit. The changes of light over this vast sculptured escarpment are always bringing out some new beauty, and as the slopes turn brown and mellow under the plough, or change the green of early summer to yellow harvest, there is always some fresh charm in the peaceful scene. On the south the house and garden lie open to the hillside and the hanger. That is a wood that hangs right on the hillside, as constantly seen in Hampshire.

This great hill climbing up 600 feet is

the strange characteristic of our village. On Fridays, when there are many driving to the nearest market town, all alight to climb the hill, and disappear suddenly on the steep road, long before they are out of hearing. All events from the outer world, our letters, our guests, descend as from beyond the sky, slowly and carefully. Early in the afternoon its northern side is filled with vague refreshing shadow, while the glow of the evening sun still beats upon the opposite and lower wall of the valley, and it rises up against the sunset, a boundary and watch tower of our lowly life.

The traveller, coming from our market town and railroad has a long ascending six miles to reach the summit, passing on the way only two tiny hamlets clustered each around its church and manor, then descends rapidly for nearly a mile, when looking down between the stems of graceful firs he sees the little village held as in the hollow of a hand, the ancient stone church shepherding the flock of homesteads and the crowded fold of those that sleep. Pious and blessed hands have recently saved



Art Repro. Co., ph., sc. In the Vicar's Garden.

the precious edifice from decay, and have added a new acre, climbing up the hill beyond. The little church of the twelfth century is built with massive columns, grand arches, and timber roof, and has a chime of deep-voiced bells. It was affiliated to the see of Tarrant in Gloucestershire, and possibly the stones for the interior were brought thence. Many carved capitals lying scattered in a neighbouring pasture indicate other lost ecclesiastical buildings, but records previous to the fifteenth century have been destroyed.

Next to the church is a handsome brick farmhouse, with walled enclosure and ornamented gate piers, on which is the date 1580.

The highroad, after descending the hill, passes through the village, crosses the valley lane which threads the little dwellings, and continues through scenes of almost weird loneliness. The drive is bordered with grassy rides filling the bottom of a shallow valley and winding between low, wooded hills. Tread very softly on the noiseless turf if you would surprise the thousand

rabbits feeding there in the evening, or the coveys of partridges leisurely dusting in the road. After three miles of this solitude we come to a stately brick mansion, built by Inigo Jones, with walled pleasaunce and dependent farms, whose owner is also vicar of a tiny parish. The ancient church exists no longer save in its reverently preserved site, but a modern substitute is placed a mile up through the wood in a cluster of dwellings.

The costly character of some of these scattered mansions, erected when materials had to be carted from afar, testifies that people of wealth and taste had in those days no aversion to solitude. Why has the need of company become so strong in modern life, when we may have letters and books and newspapers to keep us in touch with the absent world, and yet are not satisfied?

From Netherton House the road narrows to a mere farm track, rising briskly among bleak, unwooded downs soon abandoned to sheep pasture. Their grassy domes, for many miles unhedged and treeless, rise to

the highest point of the southern range. On the highest, bleakest summit is a strange erection something like a sign-post in shape. Yes it is the sign-post of the wide road that leads to destruction—nothing less than a gibbet of ancient days, where many a man has paid the death penalty for stealing a sheep. This gruesome signal is still preserved, because on its maintenance depends a dole of bread. There, good people, is the sign-post of the wide road you must avoid, and here is a gift of bread for the godly.

Among these hills is the cradle of our race; scarcely a ridge against the sky but is marked by fort or barrow of forgotten peoples. Stonehenge is near, and fragments of Roman roads draw their straight lines across the landscape. Here the church builders, in their time, raised memorials—Winchester and Romsey and Salisbury, and not these only, but in many a nameless hamlet little churches with grand columns and arches and bells still tuneful. Not alone corn do these hillsides bear on their knees, but plentiful crops of boys and girls, who

climb up and away to far-off lands, but forget not their cradle.

Come back to my nest in the valley, to my little garden, whose high brick wall cuts across the sunset, then turns on the north-west corner past a group of stately elms where rooks hold converse. A few distant roofs are seen above and beyond, and above them the northern wall of the valley rises steep and high. It is a little village, cosy and sheltered, that seems to be held in the hollow of a hand.

In early spring people begin to ask, "Is the water out?" At last some tell us joyfully: "The water is coming," and then suddenly under those elm trees and all down the valley is the silver gleam of a swift-running brook. Pure and new and fresh it is at first; crystal clear, filtered through the deep chalk strata, it bursts out with a glad ripple of laughter, and swishes merrily down its old course swift and deep. There is something in its sudden return and lively movement that savours of personal life, and if any stream has a Naiad, surely it is this. At first all the village gazes delighted at her

pure transparent current, at the shallow expanses which she spreads over the water-meadows, enriching the grass, and the wide shining ponds where she lingers in the pastures. Very soon little boys throw pebbles into the stream, ducks swim in it, horses and cattle wallow in the shallows, sheep are washed at the shearing; gradually the bright waters are dimmed with floating weeds and lose their swift joyfulness. By June the Naiad shrinks silently back to her cave under Sheepless Hill.

My little cottage which looks down the valley and the water-meadows has a quaint character, revealing in its whole structure the ideas which predominate in village life now as two hundred years ago. A date of 1745 over the door carries us back in history, but here as yet modern changes have scarcely appeared. Its wide, low front is of very fine brickwork, a black brick set in at regular intervals, neat eyebrows over the windows, and toothed cornice under the deep eaves of its thatched roof. On each side of the door graceful columns of rubbed brick, very exquisitely done, with fine mouldings on the

capitals and bases, are a freak of pure ornamental extravagance. They support nothing, certainly never did, not even a porch; it is a mystery why such elaborate ornament should have been bestowed on so tiny a dwelling. Between them over the door is the place of a window filled with plaster; probably filled in the days when windows were heavily taxed. Some similar closed windows in other old cottages are painted to look like windows, for our local artist takes great pride in the "values" he observes; but mine is coloured a plain lavender blue, like the door and shutters of the ground-floor.

The whole appearance from the road is very dainty, especially when spring flowers fill the beds bordered with box, or the *Seven Sisters* rose is in bloom twined about a lime. The lime or linden trees stand on the boundary of the road, and correspond in height and size with the brick columns, making a sort of architectural colonnade. They were pollarded long ago, and every summer send out a fresh green screen to shade the upper windows, kindly dropping it when the morn-

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Art Retro. Co., ph., sc. The Author's Cottage.

ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-FIELDS
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ing sun of winter is desired. Their green tops are clipped to a flat wall.

The back of the cottage is not in brick. Flints were thought quite good enough where not in the public view. On this side the roof is combed down over the bedroom windows, which are only leaded lights with little diamond panes. The square panes and window-sashes of the front must have been thought finer than leaded casements some hundred and fifty years ago. The doors on the back open by pulling a bobbin, precisely as in the history of Little Red Riding-Hood, and the bolts are primitive slides of wood.

Indoors the partitions are made by mere hurdles plastered over very unevenly, but the "best room" is lined with very pretty panels with arched tops, difficult to make and well made. The framework revealed in the cellar and loft is of solid round oak timbers just as they grew, still strong and sturdy for a long life. The floors have a curious dip, alarming until I discovered that the beams on which they rest taper a little, being unhewn as the trees grew, and therefore, the preference of horizontal ceilings

being accorded to the best rooms, the floors above have to take a slant on the tapering side of the beams. Surely the men who built that skilful brick front knew how to level the beams had they cared.

It is all characteristic of farmers' life even now: sturdy giant frame able to bear twice the weight ever put upon it, a brave display toward the street and the public, and, in unseen places, closest economy.

A detached house of brick with tiled roof, unplastered within, is a sort of outside kitchen; it covers the pump and has brick ovens, coppers set over furnaces, a brewing vat and a huge open fireplace where a whole sheep could be roasted. Perhaps it did not always smoke as now it does, and this detached tiled building, with such provisions for cooking, may have been considered safer where thatch is used on the house. The charms of thatch cannot be understood until you sleep under its thick covering where rain falls silently, where summer's sun cannot penetrate nor winter's cold.

Strange lives must have passed in this little dwelling. The ceiling of one bed-

room has a large round break where a former master, while lying in bed, fired off his gun through it "to frighten his wife." An old woman came into it once and said to me, "There stood the coffin of my little sister. It is the only thing I remember in this house." Still further back William Cobbett, the great Radical of the beginning of last century, was a constant visitor here, and many of his rural rides tended hither, where his description of them was often written. Here, too, he may have studied and written his booklet on "Cottage Economies," or "Information relative to the baking of bread, keeping of cows, pigs, bees, ewes, goats, poultry and rabbits, and other matters useful to a labourer's family," all which economies are still carefully practised in the village. The well-to-do also make sundry fermented wines from dandelion, cowslip, rhubarb, and sloes. Old people, retiring from active work, built this little house for a resting-place of old age, and that is the character most distinctly marked upon it. Then came young couples making it their first home, whose children soon crowded the

tiny chambers. It is fittest for a solitary old woman. The little rooms, only twelve feet square, look very pretty with dainty Chippendale furniture. Long-legged chairs and little corner tables seem especially made for such nooks. There is every little housekeeping contrivance of cupboards and storerooms, but room for busy life there is none. Even the maid, going to and fro, seems to fill the whole place with bustle. If one lives in a cottage, one must live out of it! In evening it is quiet enough; but by day with its bustle of work, creaking doors and stairs and pump—leave it!

Therefore I built myself a studio, quite a hundred feet away, where I spend the days among flowers and wild birds.

When first I came into possession, my accumulations of five and twenty years were packed in two rooms, and the task of extricating and distributing the furniture to its proper places devolved upon myself. For this dusty work I put on, over all, a blue galabea, a souvenir of the graceful Cairo people, but probably far from graceful on a thick old lady.

I do not really feel old, but often call myself so for fear of forgetting the disagreeable fact, unperceived until one drizzling, pea-soup day in London ten years ago. As I was nearing home, damp and tired, a rude little girl called out from a doorway: "Old woman, give me your umbrella!" With a shock I recognised the ring of truth in her remark, but it is well to recall her words when my spirits are too high. How very strange that people think me old! I've only lately come to believe in the life eternal, and with all that in prospect I feel quite a child.

But to return to my house-arranging. Many a time something was wanted from the shop, but if I thought of sending my little maid, she made such a great show of occupation that I preferred to run my own errands. I could run down to the village shop and post-office in only a minute, dressed in this beautiful galabea, without even the trouble of finding a hat. How delightfully private the village seemed! There were two farmhouses to pass and three cottages, the George Inn, and then you were at the centre of our life, where two roads crossed. Here

was the shop and post-office presided over by the most dignified and orderly mistress. The houses and picturesque thatched cottages all had their white curtained windows, and, excepting at noon, when working-men came home to dinner, there was no sign of life. Little did I dream that behind almost every window-blind was an eye in ambush, cocked most critically upon me and my strange dress. What was it I bought? A dust-pan and broom probably, which Mrs. Brown offered to send by-and-by. "Oh no indeed, I'll take them, I am really waiting for them." The post-mistress then began carefully and slowly to tie them up in paper, just like that with which we were already overwhelmed, for, as furniture was unwrapped, as the chair legs were unbandaged and packages opened, papers engulfed us in a heap of whirling scraps, dangerous and untidy, difficult to get rid of. So off I took the paper to leave it in the shop. Great was the dignity and adroitness of Mrs. Brown's rebuke: "Madam, I should be quite ashamed to give you anything not wrapped up." But I snatched up my dust-pan and briskly made for home,

turning over this word meanwhile. What did she mean? Is there an etiquette even in a hamlet? A strange suspicion as to the window-blinds made me hurry past them. Just at my door some little children curtseyed or pulled their forelocks, which encouraged me. Surely children always know what people are, not that I wished to set up for a position; but respect is especially pleasing when there is some doubt of deserving it.

When my windows were at last respectably veiled and the furniture got into its place, and an air of prettiness in the little white interior, which it perhaps had never known before, the inhabitants of the private windows began to call. The knock of the first visitor was a terrible shock; solitude and peace I wanted, and after a call of an hour's duration I longed for solitude more than ever. My visitors had no topics, no books, no studies, no interests except the new vicar and the servant question, and they generally whispered, because the maid was supposed to be eavesdropping, as indeed she was.

A talk with one of these reminded me by contrast of a visit in childhood to a farm-

house in Pennsylvania, in the village of Kennet Square. Three of us children were there with our governess for a holiday. The farmhouse was kept in scrupulous neatness, with floors scrubbed as white as the deck of a Cunarder. Shall I ever forget the ink-spot I left on one, which occasioned more grief and trouble than if it had befallen a fine carpet! The farmer and his wife had young girl and boy "helps," who were treated like their children. The farmer himself sowed, ploughed, and reaped, and his wife baked, churned, and scrubbed, with no sense of disgrace. There was a reading and sewing club, which met frequently at various farms; women brought their own plain sewing, not fancy work for a bazaar. One dame in turn read. When it met at the Locusts, I, ten years old, was allowed to be present. What they read interested me, and some passages stuck in my head; but it happened to be quite twenty years, more shame to me, before I found and recognised them in Buckle's "History of Civilisation."

For people who are interested in such books there is no indignity in manual labour; their

minds rise over it, like the lark above her meadow. It is quite certain that no such book, and seldom even a copy of Shakespeare or a novel by Scott, is to be found in these handsome farmhouses, but always a piano.

The girls are often surprisingly good musicians, and many of them scud away on their bicycles to study *Art* in the nearest South Kensington branch.

The degrees of social position are mysterious beyond comprehension. I heard of one dame who, having opened her door to a mechanic, did not deign to speak to him, but sent her servant to receive his message. A few days later the same carpenter was helping me to strain a large canvas, and I, too, had my hammer and did my share of it. So I said: "What would Mrs. Good think of my working like this with you?" "She was not brought up to work," he gravely replied.

To the same lady, who supplied me with milk and butter, I attempted, during her rather prolonged visit, to discuss the interests and attractions of a dairy, but she replied that she knew little about that, as she used to live in London.

In London, but never among that delightful throng who are doing, writing, thinking, painting, talking—oh! especially talking—winged words that skim the rushing river of life, where ideas that everybody is thinking seem to be one's own thoughts, and fill every one with the stir and rush of multitudinous vitality; for ideas and thoughts are catching. That in the past.

Now stranded in this little backwater, dozing among lilies and weeds, I had expected my solitude to be filled with pleasant, even brilliant ideas, but found instead my mind to be a mere pond full of other people's reflections, and now to the very bottom empty, dead of drought. Would no new seed of thought, wind-borne from across the hill, take root in it? No; I looked over fields of cabbage-heads, and dreaded to become one of them.

A brother of the brush who had painted a sign of "George and the Dragon," apparently without the benefit of a sovereign for model, came to fraternise. He had also produced that row of sham windows "quite natural"; but even this artistic society did not somehow seem stimulating.

To the farmers' wives my exploits with spade and fork, my sifting of loam and carrying manure, and my flower garden, of which I delighted to brag to them, indicated humble birth. One of them proposed to confer upon me the honour of teaching her daughter to paint, and assumed a lofty air of patronage. "Pupils were not in my line; but it was possible the young girl had great talent, and did she wish to support herself as an artist?" With great pride: "Oh no; she does not have to work." Then said I: "I feel no interest in teaching her." Confused surprise!

As years have gone on I have discovered those thrifty simple folk who are the substantial, sensible cultivators of our land, and whose wives are not above the cares of dairy and poultry. It is pleasant to meet the farmer in his field where he willingly permits my rambles, or to peer into a dark barn and find him looking on at his shearing, or in the harvest-field where he measures the work of the reapers who are paid by piece. I have never seen one of the farmers put his own hand to plough

or reap, as formerly was usual in America.

Short as the time is since I came here, it is long enough to have seen pretentious folk give up their farms, while some who began as labourers have become thriving small cultivators. In one case a legacy enabled the family to buy one cow. Wife and daughters were not above driving her to the common for pasture, or learning to make the best butter. Now they have seven cows and pasture of their own. Another family of brothers rented jointly a small farm, which they have worked so profitably as to be able to increase their holdings and to invest in valuable agricultural machines for their own use and for hire. They do the real labour of their land, and their families occupy the comfortable house together.

Simple labourers are to me more sympathetic than their masters. The impossibility of pretension, and the calmness with which they live by daily bread, dignify in character what is lacking in education. Many among them I have come to know well; for when the winter comes and work

is not pressing, they have spent an hour or two in my studio being painted, and won to talking without shyness. They certainly have no conversational gifts, and, having nothing to say, do not say it.

Our village affords exceptional advantages in its spacious common of six hundred acres, where each cottager may pasture two cows. This pasture land lies on the top of the hill, in glades sheltered by groves of oak, and bordered by copses of nutwood and thickets of fern. Here they may gather nitches of deadwood and dried fern, plentiful nuts, wild plums and berries, even Alpine strawberries in abundance. If by rare chance they perceive the beauty of the earth, they know why this place calls all wanderers to return.

Below in the village are the allotments, where each cottager may hire, for two shillings and sevenpence a year, a strip of well-lying land, two hundred feet long and fifteen wide. The allotments lie together, separated by narrow grass paths. Here the labourer, after his long day's work for hire, never less than ten hours, works

for an hour or two in the evening and gets potatoes and greens for his household.

Our farmhouses are usually fine brick buildings with tiled roofs, in the stately, severe taste of two centuries ago, standing back from the road among their colony of barns, ample ricks, and walled yards, sheltered by noble trees. They bespeak a life of wealth and abundance. The labourers' cottages, near at hand, are little whitened huts, curiously compounded of bricks, timber, hurdles, and mortar (called expressively wattle and daub), and covered with thatch. From a distance they are scarcely distinguishable from the ricks. Two or three tiny rooms shelter large families living by unceasing toil; toil which has no reward but daily bread and hardly enough of that. And yet, in this narrow home, affection and self-sacrifice find room enough. Many a man with eight or nine children receives only eleven shillings a week for daily work from dawn to dark. A little extra money for harvest pays the rent and spare fuel. They must begin their life of toil so soon as school board requirements are satisfied, and

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The Oldest Cottage.

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very often have to trudge two or three miles to their work, which begins at seven o'clock. Boys have only sixpence a day, with thirty shillings at Michaelmas. What wonder that sometimes they look rather lounging and listless, with their growing youth's hunger never quite satisfied at the crowded home table.

At harvest or haymaking they often find work seven or ten miles distant, where they sleep under a hedge and walk home occasionally for cooked food. Meat is certainly not tasted except on Sundays.

How can they study in the evening? Have you ever tried to read or study after ten hours of manual labour? It must be something of extraordinary interest that will keep one awake, and besides these poor people have no bright lamps, no quiet rooms. There is nothing for the growing men so cheerful as the Plough Inn, but there I have not followed them.

A place so poor as ours has no club, reading-room, or library. There is a small parish room at the Vicarage, where some books are to be found, and newspapers, but

a very few men fill it. Many of our people go to chapel and will not be beholden to the Vicarage, where all are really welcome.

To many of the men and boys the choir practice and Sunday services are their greatest pleasure and pride. Twenty-four sing in our ancient church, neatly dressed in cassock and surplice, with face and hair scrubbed and burnished. At least on one day in the week they have a glad sense of belonging to the highest service, if perhaps not always a religious emotion. Then, too, the choir has an annual fête in summer, a visit to London by excursion train, to see Olympia, Madame Tussaud's, or the Zoo, and return late at night in joyous excitement.

At Christmas they make a visit in full company to the various houses of richer members of the congregation, singing carols and receiving small presents. It is rather an important occasion, requiring a little speech from the audience and involving some mutual shyness. On their last visit I welcomed them in the studio and listened to three long carols,

and all was happily over; but two of the smallest choristers were not in the company. Scarcely had the men and boys left me to continue their round, when the missing nine-year-old urchins appeared at the end of the path, overcome with alarm, afraid to venture forward. I called out "What is it, boys?" "Please, ma'am, would you like to hear some singing?" "Certainly; come in." So they took a position in the studio and gave very well the three long hymns to which I had already patiently listened, and quite lost their shyness and departed very proud and happy. The men said they were too little to go out with them, but this they had properly disproved, and they really could read their words and knew their music well, dear little chaps. The carols begin on Christmas Eve and last until Boxing Night, and the same songs are sung over and over again. Perhaps in the darkness and with faces concealed under fringes of cut paper, the same boys come more than once, as some artlessly confessed. It is a difficult matter to keep a supply of small coin for the carollers.

The only amusement for girls is the fête of their Friendly Society, and that brings many young servants home from their places in towns for a summer holiday. Fresh cotton frocks and straw hats set off their pretty faces and figures. These people are often very handsome, even beautiful, but at forty a workman has stiff limbs and gait, and his face is lined as by heavy years. There is little chance for them to seek a neighbourhood of higher wages. Moving their little households to any distance would be a ruinous expense, but the children at least go out into the world at twelve years old, perhaps far away, and parents grow into easier, though solitary, old age. There are often little extras to their small wages, in their pig, or a hatching of ducks or chickens. If a man's pig dies a natural death he expects us all to help him buy another. On the common they gather stores of dead wood and small fuel and dried bracken. Even the aged blind woman is led up the hill and breathes the fresh sea air in that higher atmosphere, returning with a load that almost hides her bent figure.

Dried fern is good bedding for the pig and tender plants. Then, too, there is liberal gleaning and, in autumn, nuts, wild berries, and mushrooms may be gathered to sell, and women are paid a little for turning hay and weeding. The last work of the old labourer is road-mending, and it is strange to see those who are past all active work sitting on the roadside breaking flint. Any work is happier than idleness, for without mental activity it is impossible to be idle amusingly. It is touching to note the frequent deaths of aged people at their work or in the field. Touching, too, to note the nameless mounds on the hill above the church, where the long grass is neatly trimmed and fresh flowers constantly laid by those who remember. Saturday evening is the favourite time for tending these memorials. There to-day came an old man, far in the eighties, carrying up the steep path a can of water for the newly planted flower on his wife's grave. He said: "I am so glad she did not have to live after me."

I love to see the harvest work. There

is a grand cornfield quite near. Down through the green lane under cool shade from overhanging ash, between walls of clematis and honeysuckle in bloom, we come suddenly into unusual stir. Little children, tidily dressed, are in charge of thirsty babies and of baskets with refreshing drinks, not for the babies—bottles wrapped in big leaves and kept in the cool shade—home-brewed beer it may be or cold tea. Even these children, still too young to help bind, look eager and excited, for it is a great day for the labourers. Men are paid by the measure which they cut, not by time; and some have earned in one day, with wife and children to help tie, as much as fifteen shillings. A long day of English midsummer—from dawn to dark — may give fourteen hours of labour. All the rest of the year is ordinary routine from seven to five. The wage is not more than two shillings per day, often less, so the busy harvest weeks are fraught with all the golden riches of the year.

The shady lane suddenly opens to a wide field. There it lies in the lap of the

great down, like a basin of gold filled to the brim with quivering light, one broad thirty-acre field, all wheat, with its sun-burnt heavy ears looking like golden nuggets. Far up, to the left, where the golden bowl fits into the side of the hill, is a little copse. Tall trees fling their branches darkly against the blue. Everywhere else, as far as the eye can seek, up to the rim of the hills, is golden grain. What dazzling sunshine now at high noon!

As the mowers pass, the red gold disappears. As the standing corn falls, and the straw lies flat, its colour changes to silver, with shadows softly violet.

The air is dry, but we see things through haze like a gauzy veil, which is not moisture, but dust from the falling corn. Waves of light refracted, palpitating, turned back from everything, splintered, glittering, yet somehow vague for very excess of brightness, shimmering under the dry east wind.

There are many companies of mowers in the field, for it must be done before night. Each reaper has his wife or daughters and boys to heap and bind,

shirt sleeves rolled up, trousers belted and gartered, felt hats, necks and arms copper-brown and glistening, the shirts look blue, the corduroy trousers white or grey. The girls have fresh cotton frocks, white aprons, and all have the air of taking the work joyfully like a holiday.

The young man, now beginning quite near me, rushes into his task like a swimmer breasting the waves. He plants his feet wide apart, grasps the scythe for a mighty sweep, and leans forward for the free swing of his arms. The wheat stands up to his face. With rapid, rhythmical strides and swinging arms he cleaves a path through the standing rustling corn, and as he forges on, breast deep, behind him lie eddies of silver and violet, still and motionless like the ripples printed on a sandy beach.

Now he turns and comes towards me, his eager face scarcely above the corn; swiftly he comes, proud of his skill and strength. Good nature and breath enough he has to fling out a merry word to the little children sitting near me under the hedgerow, and to

call cheerily to the big boy and girl, the latter his sister most likely, to bind his sheaves. Once a covey of partridges rose wildly in front of him and winged whirring on towards the coppice.

This is not a cricket ground, but all the spirit of that game is here. The men are displaying their strength and endurance for the admiration of wives or sweethearts. Even those who stand and wait are broiled in the sun, but the mowers stream with sweat. They often mop their brows, or eyes would be blinded. Now and then one calls for a drink, and a child, knowing the voice, runs out with a basket of provisions. It is thirsty work indeed.

In the middle of the field are an elderly couple. A man of heavy build and a woman, thick in the waist as we grow to be past middle life. Their children must be fledged and flown, for they work together without attendants. The woman is binding his sheaves and keeping her food-basket near. They are growing farther and farther away, their task lying upwards to the opposite boundary—like the path of their lives

away from youth and childhood. To them only, in all the field, there seems to be toil without joy.

How well I remember this field last spring. It had just been ploughed and planted. I crossed it by the narrow footpath, amazed at the number of flints and stones. It seemed like a turnpike newly dressed and waiting for the steam-roller. To tread down the old path again needed iron shoes. How could anything grow in so stony a soil! Now I understand that in the long drought of summer these very stones prevent evaporation, and keep the earth below them moist and firm for the growing crop. From these flints perhaps the wheat derives its bone food. The very bones of mother earth transmuted to bone for her children.

The long day fades at last; all over the vast field have risen mounds of sheaves; the sun as it passes beyond them gives each a tint of lavender on the shady side and a crest of fretted, red gold. The colour of the whole field is changed since the prostrate straw is gathered into mounds and the stubbly surface appears between. As the sun dips below the rim of

the great basin, the sheaves near the top lose their shadow and gleam, and are merged into vague tones of mauve. The transformation spreads downward into the hollow, and at last the whole great field is shaded and grey. An emerald light flashes a moment longer in the tree that lifts its crown highest out of the copse and still sees the sun, then all fades into one monotonous tone. The work is done. Tired indeed are the reapers, but happy in the task accomplished. Children bring them their jackets and homeward they turn, across the stubble, up over the hill towards the gap in the hedge where we last saw the sun.

And now the earth is alone and silent, her riches are gathered under the eyes of heaven and night.

A HALF-TIME BOY AND A GOAT

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Spring Pasture.

CHAPTER II

A HALF-TIME BOY AND A GOAT

ROM the leisurely processes of Nature, country folks have learned patience. Their forebears began to study the lesson centuries ago, and this generation is evolved with a fine inclination to patience. The conviction that seasons will move on at their own gait makes them leisurely and calm in all their undertakings.

Those hurried, harried city folk who come to live among them, bring a foreign quickness and adroitness and an eager hurry to spur the march of time that indeed surprise the calm rural mind. Country folk are used to set out mere cuttings around their enclosures and wait years for them to become hedges, to sow asparagus and wait four years to cut it, to plant young fruit trees and

train them year after year to fruiting branches.

As time makes the objects of their care finer and stronger they look on the passing years without misgivings or regret.

Bustling city folk, on the contrary, plant their fruit trees fully trained, their hedges yard high, their asparagus two years old at least, their roses at full growth, and after a time find that seedlings and cuttings and young trees have overtaken them. They are always afraid of losing time, though most of them on Sundays say they believe in life eternal.

When I settled down in these quiet fields, that feverish town-bred impatience was still in my veins; but luckily I could not gratify it. My first invaluable lesson was to wait.

There was but one thing for which I could not wait. The eight pollard lime trees in front of my cottage had been long neglected. Their top growths, escaping from all restriction, thrust their leaves into my windows, excluding light and air.

I hurried to the carpenter—who else should cut trees?—and insisted he should

saw them off that very day. To my surprise this office was considered unworthy of his particular craft, and a saw was not the proper tool—and one must wait until autumn. I insisted that to live in a tree-top would give me asthma and, on this account, was allowed to have my way; but a labourer, not the carpenter, came with a riphook and an axe and chopped off the smothering branches. Then gradually my household affairs settled into place and my energies were turned to the half-acre of rank grass and weeds called a garden. Part of it had been planted with potatoes and cabbages, but they were precisely the vegetables I never ate. At the end of the potato patch were three very old apple trees, decaying and leafless. One held up its two bare arms with an imploring gesture that wrung my sympathetic heart. In front of them was a row of gooseberry bushes. A fine brick wall, lichen-stained and grey and weathered to subdued colour, surrounded the garden on the north and west sides; its west side was festooned with masses of vine, rank, uncared for, and between them and the parallel row of gooseberries was a plot of

rough, rank grass, full of daisies and buttercups knee-deep in dewy verdure. It puzzled me how it should be kept cut. I fancied it would cost a fortune, my fortune at least, and, even if I had a lawn-mower, the ground was much too rough. Why not find some little animal to eat it quietly off walking regularly to and fro, so that by the time he had munched the last row, the first would again be ready to appease his appetite. How peaceful, I thought, to watch its complacent satisfaction. Now I had caught sight of a white goat somewhere in the village and this little beast perhaps suggested my idea.

Johnny, whose assistance as half-time gardener I had accepted because public opinion indicated that course—Johnny said: "Yes, a Nanny goat, she'd be a nice thing, that ud eat all this grass." "Well, Johnny, find me a goat;" but he did not bring it at once, as I demanded impatiently. Somewhere there was a hitch, though I hurried him every day. At last the goat was produced, —a white Nanny with a pretty kid. They belonged to the shrewd son of our builder, who built, painted, and patched, in a circum-

ference of ten miles, unrivalled and alone. He offered the goat for ten shillings, but the little kid must accompany her until able to lead an independent life, and the price did not include her leather collar. Ten shillings was paid down, the goat was mine, my best shawl-strap shortened to fit her neck, whereby she was tied to a stake driven into the long grass, and immediately the mowing began. It did not proceed in even rows like the lawn-mowers at my friends' places, according to my anticipations. Her mowing was circular, in circles measured by the radius of her tether, and when she had made several of these round bare patches, the long grass surrounding looked still more ragged and uncouth.

The little kid for the first days kept quietly near its mother. They made a satisfactory group, and a pretty effect of white in the too universal green and yellow of May. On the whole they pleased me, although they firmly refused my overtures of friendship and maintained the country etiquette, *keeping themselves to themselves*. For Johnny they had less reserve. The boy

was exceedingly happy. It had been difficult to find occupation for him. His half-day began at seven, at eight he went home to breakfast, and afterwards worked until noon. In that part of the early morning which passed before my appearance he had been observed by me from an upper window to nibble currants and gooseberries, and to throw stones at birds' nests; later in the day he displayed apparent energy in preparing light kindling wood, which occupied a couple of hours, but two hours were left idle on his hands with Satan at his elbow. I urged him to pull up weeds, but his true masculine contempt for that work was already highly developed; I should have had to show him the particular weeds, and, being then rather uncertain about them in their earlier appearance, it was a doubtful expedient.

For these reasons it was a relief to find a vocation for the boy. He asked permission to make a shelter for the goat. Strange to say it had never occurred to me! Of course I gave him some old packing-cases and timbers, and for several days Johnny

was off my mind. He produced a wonderful little shed, a lean-to on the only remaining wall of the old ruined stable. The roof was thatched with branches trimmed off the limes, and the entrance closed with a hurdle. It was certainly well done for a boy of ten years, and now I hoped he would somehow hurry the growth of peas and beans; but said Johnny: "Please, ma'am, can you let me have a little milking tin, because the goat ought to be milked, or else when the kid is taken away she'll run dry." This did not appear to me a calamity; indeed my whole requirements from Nanny were that she should look pretty and keep the grass short, but I couldn't refuse the outlay of another shilling if she really proposed to supply milk. Johnny made his selection at the shop, and then with the goat and kid retired into the privacy of the new stable, and closed the hurdle. He said it was necessary to get her against a wall, so that she could not escape. From the occasional sounds proceeding from the shed I thought Johnny very courageous. Hours passed—it seemed a tedious milking—but at

his dinner hour the boy emerged, and the goat was permitted to return to her pasture. The milking tin was brought to me with about a tablespoonful of strongly perfumed liquid at the bottom of it. Johnny's face was very red and hot, his hands very dirty, the milk suspiciously powdered with earth. Rather than incur the expense of building a dairy, I recklessly and generously gave Johnny the milk to divide with his five sisters.

"Where did you learn to milk, my boy?"

"I never did learn, ma'am; I never milked anything afore."

"And the goat, is she used to milking?"

"No, m'—that be her first kid."

The poor goat really deserved compassion, but this experience was repeated daily, though I declined to see again the milk produced under such difficulties.

Meanwhile the little kid frisked and bounded, developing most extraordinary activity; it could even climb into the notch of the old apple tree, but preferred to nibble my row of broad beans just in flower. I had

to keep an eye upon him from my studio window and make frequent sallies to save the vegetables, and this rather hindered my painting.

The bare circles in the grass were now pretty numerous, in fact long ragged fringes of grass were the exception, and Nan most provokingly manifested distaste for some very rich-looking leaves, which I afterwards learned were horse-radish run wild. She had not the impartiality of a mowing machine. The stake to which she was tethered left deep holes in the turf, very deep and many. Johnny suggested that it was time to plant turnips, as even now there was nothing for her to eat! What a surprise! She must finish the long grass, and lots of grape-vine trimmings—what better could she want? She did want more. She had observed the tender green of a row of peas, and a little patch of lettuce, the hope of summer. With designing secrecy she concealed her notice of these promising delicacies, and waited until late on a moonlight night to break down her hurdle and run to her feast.

It just happened that I, dressed for bed,

took a last look at the moonlight, and there among my vegetables saw the wicked white goat and her equally unscrupulous kid.

It would be difficult to describe the chase that ensued, or how the strange creatures capered like witches from one end of my ground to another. The kid attained a high place in the arms of the old apple tree, whence it surveyed with approval the various assaults delivered by its mother. When she charged at me head down with great impetus from a long run, I acquired unexpected nimbleness in dodging. There was indeed a contest of courage and activity that many people would have enjoyed to see—considering especially the moonlight night and the costume of the lady engaged in this unequal competition. All my efforts to catch that abominable Nanny goat were in vain, and the kid in the apple tree laughed with glee,—until I was glad to escape from the white witch's malice, and leave her in possession of the trampled vegetables.

Johnny, next morning, was very much grieved at the verdict passed upon his favourites—that they must go; but it was

foolish of me to entrust him with the negotiations for their departure. To my amazement no one would have them. Not have a goat worth ten shillings? No, not even for one night would her former master give her shelter. The kid he had to take, as it was in our agreement, but even as a gift he would not take the goat. Johnny looked complacent, made purchases of turnips and hay for his beloved vixen, for which I paid, day after day made inquiries, but could hear of no one willing to purchase, even for a song, this valuable animal. At last I decreed that, unless a purchaser was found, she should go the very next day to the butcher. This cruel sentence stimulated him to greater efforts, and he quickly brought an offer of half-a-crown, this time to include the collar. Her destiny was very happy and useful, for she was given young orphan lambs to nurse.

This episode was the last of my great follies, at least so I fancied until, some years later, I surrendered my liberty and independence to a dog.

That was much worse.

As to the boy, I found he would do as model for an angel, which kept him employed under my very eyes. It ultimately happened that this picture, carried a hundred miles away, served as a sort of testimonial to his character, and obtained for him his first proper situation.

MY GARDEN

CHAPTER III

MY GARDEN

HEN rid of my goat and also of the early boy (who had plucked the fruit, hunted birds' nests, and left the slug and weed to flourish), I found myself in undisputed possession of the garden — a garden well stocked only in slugs and weeds.

Out of respect to public opinion the usual stalwart vegetables had been planted, cabbages and onions in rows, carrots and potatoes; all detestable either to eat or to look at. All good ground and open places were filled with these, but under the clump of yews by the studio door, where elder bushes and briars had sprung up, it was allowable to make a flower bed, for nothing else would grow there.

As yet I had no notion how many vegetables we needed, having hitherto bought

them daily; the area they covered, taking the year altogether, was a great surprise.

Gardening was new to me, but a long acquaintance with florists' windows suggested the purchase of *Lilium auratum* as a modest beginning. A friend gave me tulips and crocuses, and a few young fruit trees were bought. A jobbing gardener was recommended, in whose experience I rashly trusted. The fruit trees were planted first, and then I asked where the lily bulbs would do best. "Lilies," said he; "ah, they takes up a great deal of room. They'll do almost anywheres. Over yon by the wall they'd be out of the way." Thus my lilies were banished to a hard, undrained, chalky gravel in full sun, and in this they disappeared. In time I learned that the wild convolvulus, a very troublesome weed in this district, is called lily, and it is easily understood that my gardener, who in fact was merely a vegetable man, supposed they grew from fine bulbs, for no man ever looks at the root of a weed. He chops them up with a hoe and replants. Of course one who can earn two shillings a day feels that his time is too

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valuable for mere weeding. He planted my tulips with equal skill, having buried a lot of rubbish in a hole from which one of the dead apple trees had been uprooted, the tulips were put in near the top—and I looked on with confidence in his knowledge. Nothing came up. Since then I study books and plant for myself.

Luckily this skilled gardener was too busy when my young asparagus plants arrived to put them in, so, with the help of two little boys and reading out instructions, we did it beautifully, and asparagus has flourished.

The barren places under the yew trees were choked with elder bushes and briars. These were picked out, and straggling, dead branches pruned until a pleasant sloping bank, facing south-east, lay at the foot of the dark trees. Their lower growth and the little studio shut off the north-west winds, and long sweeping branches hanging south over the meadow lent cool shades about noon. In winter it is a very warm spot, for from daybreak until he dips below the hill the sun looks in, never going behind the branches while the stately trees spread out

their fur robes against the frost and the north-west wind.

The ground was miserable, scarcely covering their roots, but, after forking it well as deep as my unpractised strength would allow, I carried many a pail of fresh loam and manure and leaf mould, and heaped it up to a respectable depth. Big stones, in which these chalk downs are prolific, were built in at intervals to keep the earth from washing away, and it became in time a cosy sheltered corner, an inviting home for many little plants; and to the woods I went to look for colonists.

It is a long way to the woods, but every step lifts you up and up into fresher air and a wider outlook over pastures and cornfields. Sometimes one may leave the highroad, passing through the lofty hedge of thorn, wild-rose, dogwood and traveller's joy to a path on the side of the field where all roads are concealed. Wide hillsides dipping into valleys, vast cornlands bordered with noble trees climb into blue distance. The bold down of Sheepless Hill makes a sharp notch on the horizon. In the warm afternoon

lazy clouds swim in the transparent air, and islands of shade follow them over the sculptured valleys, marking unsuspected hollows and promontories.

Just below lies a wheatfield like a cup of gold. Standing in the bottom you may look up as to the rim of a golden basin rounding up to the very sky. From this height it seems a mere little dimple in the vaster space. It is a long climb up the down. On the very top is a wide tableland and stretch of woods and pasture—the village common. The woodland is carefully cultivated, the undergrowth of ash and hickory saplings is felled every fifteen years—a certain portion each year. Hurdles are made in winter in the clearing; a lonely industry carried on in the heart of the quiet wood. The next summer the hurdles are carted away. The stools of the felled saplings are sending up little tender shoots. Among them stand great trees, oak and ash, that have long been spared for a nobler purpose. Strong and grand they lift their sturdy shoulders high up in the clear air, looking far over the heads of the underwood

and seeing the larger world, perhaps even a glimpse of the sea beyond the clump of Quarley beacon. In their branches the wood-pigeons murmur. Where a thicket of undergrowth has been recently felled there is for a few years a place open yet shaded by larger trees, where flowers in spring are loveliest. Here for years rich leaves have fallen among the little plants in winter, and given them mellow mould for summer's growth. Primroses come first, the loveliest and sweetest, lying like flecks of sunlight on the brown, dead leaves. The floor of the wood is tesselated with primroses and violets, there seems no room for other plants; but in a fortnight they will be going, and the same spot will be covered with wood anemones, their pale, upturned faces gazing at the sky wide-eyed. There are fields of bluebells later and Solomon's seal and woodruff, wild forget-me-nots and, in deeply shaded glades, a rare sweet-scented butterfly orchis. Her waxen purity and loveliness are startling, and you think of the enchanted ladies in fairy tales, changed from their human form and banished to the forest.

Tiny Alpine strawberries are here, and later will yield their harvest to the birds and village children. The dainty harebell must not be forgotten, *Campanula rotundifolia*, most exquisite and fragile bell.

Of all these treasures tenderly and carefully I lifted enough to fill my hopeful border, and so my blessed gardening began.

I put each among their friends as I found them, and did not forget to have loads of brown leaf mould and autumn leaves brought down the hill every winter, liberally covering the green-wood colony, for the yew of course gives them only hard needles. It is wonderful how they flourish, indeed it is the prettiest spot in my garden, for its dark background is so becoming. Gradually the lower edge farthest out from under the tree became the favourite home of Alpine columbines and of the grand snowdrop anemone. In the rougher ground up towards the hill daffodils were planted between the wild flowers, giant foxgloves for June, Japanese anemones for autumn. The woods taught me that the dispute of the old scholiasts, "How many angels can stand on the point

of a pin?" might be revived in relation to flowers, who are angels indeed. How many can flourish in the same foot of ground?

The return of the flowers is always mysterious. Proserpine at last reaches up her little imploring hand from the underworld where she ate the fatal seeds of pomegranate. She escapes for a little while, first groping with her soft green palm, and at last her face looks up with many varying expressions. In every flower is her story. Full of child-like innocence and mirth, or sometimes of mysterious regret, the flowers look out once more upon our shining world, and then vanish to live among worms and grubs.

There is a life in the underworld which we do not observe. Fibres of root spread out towards each other, touching and clinging to what they like with the sensitiveness of almost human nerves. All their dark winter there is a dream of beauty and sunshine pulsing in those sleeping tissues.

The care of my flowers became a passion. Their wants and needs I studied as though they were conscious beings, as indeed I believe them to be. Following the needs of my

flowers for shelter, or sun, or shade, paths and beds took shape and design. Greedy vegetables have learned to know their place, enclosed behind trellises of roses and fruit trees.

I experimented with seeds, and pored over Robinson's "English Flower Garden," and read catalogues of bulbs and plants, haunted by visions of beauty and covetousness; often lay awake at night to plan for their planting, or saw them vividly in dreams.

Mine was not the purse that could stock a garden in one summer, so I learned patience, and looked forward to years that would increase my few choice bulbs, gladly forgetting that time does not improve elderly ladies. Friends gave me pieces from their overflowing gardens, and I learned to propagate from cuttings and seeds. At first I made great sowings of hardy annuals while waiting to form a stock of perennials.

One of my greatest mistakes was to raise a large crop of daisies. This flower is the badge of the Ladies' College at Cheltenham, and of "Lady Margaret Hall," Oxford, be-

cause it always turns to the light and is so lowly and modest, yet flourishes everywhere. These learned ladies never had anything to do with that flower. It is the most underhand, grasping, selfish, ill-regulated little plant that exists. It takes everything it can get and gives nothing, except its little spot of white in some place where it is not wanted. It is not good for food of beast or bee, it destroys the wholesome grass, and certainly its ugly habit of crouching out of harm's way makes it decidedly insignificant, until one tries to dig it up, when its mighty power of resistance is unmasked. I don't think it at all a good emblem.

Of all the flowers that bloom there is but one of disagreeable associations. To me it is like the serpent in the Garden of Eden. This flower is of the family of Matthiola, commonly known as stocks. There are stock gillyflowers, Brompton stocks, German stocks, but ten-weeks' stocks and night-scented *Matthiola bicornis*, the species I detest, is *marginata*, and is raised in the city. There are innumerable slight variations of this species, all of which have a curious effect

on the brain. They may also be considered nerve-poisons.

This is how I came to know them. It was midwinter. My books had been read many times, and for novelty and interest I read all the fascinating catalogues which the leading florists sent me in return for my trifling purchases. I never tired of reading these, marking the plants I should like to buy, and dreaming of wonderful borders. Far from being monotonous, this occupation often kept me awake far into the night. To avoid this excitement one evening I read the newspaper thoroughly, even to the advertisements.

Among these was one offering a little pamphlet post-free to any one who wished for information as to the method of making fortunes in stocks. It had often puzzled me to know how this was done, and, from pure need of something to read, I sent for the pamphlet. It explained the whole business most clearly. One only had to send a small sum to the advertiser, which he would invest for you to the best of his ability. It was a margin (the stock *marginata*),

and at the worst it might be lost, but possibly it might be multiplied a hundred-fold. This was so like the facility with which garden stocks could be cultivated that it seemed to me most natural! Why, indeed, should not I make a fortune in this manlike way which my male advisers had always selfishly discouraged? Then I should have that fairy flower-border, perhaps with a lake and a bog garden. It would be really ridiculous, I thought, to miss such an opportunity, as the present state of the market, according to this pamphlet, indicated; so I sent off ten pounds to be invested in the most hopeful manner, and though scarcely expecting it to become a thousand, it seemed reasonable to look for twenty at the settlement. With this I would certainly establish a rosarium. The vegetables would have to go to make room for it, but with that fortune some other ground could be obtained for them. They occupied the very best part of my garden. What I wanted there was a sun-dial, with a circular seat around it, and a circle of grass from which beds of roses should radiate. Whole beds of the same

kind would be best, and the trellis of hybrid perpetuals would enclose it on the south side and be converted to a screen and shelter of dwarf fruit trees. With these pleasant plannings a new and strange mental atmosphere was unfortunately combined. Instead of enjoying my evenings in Robinson's "English Flower Garden," or Barr's "Catalogue of Alpines," I began to feel a feverish anxiety to see the newspaper, and the first page I looked for was that which recorded fluctuation in stocks. Some were rising, some falling; my own selection seesawed from day to day, and were very far from realising my expectations. At night, when I closed my eyes, instead of heavenly visions of flowers, heavy money-bags lay like lead on my fancies. For the first time in my life I realised all the odious burden of wealth or, rather, of wealth-getting. If even my small speculation had such a baleful influence that all the sweet-scented flowers of my dreams were transformed as by the touch of Midas, how could men bear their greater ventures? Somewhere, long ago, I had seen anxious-faced men reading off a tape

from a machine that clicked interminably, and at every click recorded the price of some stock rising or falling. It seemed so horrible to sit for hours hearing that machine that I never could forget the sound of it, and now the clicking tape was in my brain.

The ten-weeks' stock in my hot-frame were just coming up when the man in London began telegraphing about those stocks in the City. Capital opportunities were just occurring; as a favour they would admit me to a syndicate sure of a successful deal. A five-pound note immediately would secure great prospects. By this time I hated the very name of stocks, and made no answer. Every day, and sometimes twice a day, the little telegraph boy came running to the door bringing a new opportunity and waiting for a hurried reply. To all I wired "No." Temptations and possibilities grew in my mind like a matted jungle of weeds, and I longed for peace and poverty. I even tore up and threw away the innocent seedling stocks for their name's sake. At last, to my great thankfulness, the day of

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July Evening.

settlement arrived. The margin on my stocks was lost, and that kind London man ceased to interest himself in my affairs. He did not even reply to my letter, and a friend to whom I shamefacedly confessed this speculative venture looked up his address and found the place empty. The loss of my ten pounds did not trouble me at all; it was so delightful to have no more concern in the stock market, and to be able to turn my attention to my former peaceful occupations.

My garden is beautiful now. In its diminutive proportions there is even an effect of landscape gardening. The plants have their natural setting, background, and associates, and each one is my personal friend. They have their own friends with whom they live, like Castor and Pollux, taking turns to live in air and under the earth.

The place that in early spring embroiders its green mantle with white plumes of saxifrage, in June wears a harmony in blues and purples, and by the end of July gold and crimson.

On Sunday afternoons in summer the vil-

lagers lean over the gate of the adjoining paddock and admire. "Just look what that place is now, and what it used to be!" My stock of plants has overflowed to them, and many of their gardens are gay with emigrants from mine.

My favourite group is the little rock garden. Carefully I laid the foundations, building up deep chambers of rich soil with walls of good sandstone. Luckily, when the church was repaired, a load of such stones was procured from their refuse, for our native flints are poisonous to Alpines and saxifrages.

Here flourish Alpine pinks and phloxes, geums, poppies, silenes and gentians, blue thistles and sunroses; later, Alpine and Iceland poppies and sprays of harebells brought down from our wood. In sheltered nooks, Alpine fritillaries, auriculas, and daffodils appear. On one side the path is edged with evergreen lemon thyme, whose golden leaf bears clipping as well as box, on the other with mossy saxifrage.

The whole of the ground slopes gently, which gives considerable height to the

farther side, and three little ravines make moist and shady nooks, and by a few stepping-stones give me access to tend them. Facing the sun are creeping thymes, crimson and white, and the blue-leaved woolly thyme. Their fragrant warm carpet covers bulbs of iris, and on ledges just above and at the bottom grow aquilegias, whose foliage is always beautiful. Stout sheltering bushes of lavender, rosemary, and veronica are on the top, where they like to be dry. The opposite bank on its shady side has wood-sorrel, tufts of campanulas, and daffodils of the Alpine sorts, auriculas, Alpine poppies, and the exquisite aquilegias glandulosa and cœrulia, veronicas, and sedums at the bottom, with Iceland poppies. In moist depressions are great clumps of madonna lilies.

It is here, just above the bank of thyme, that Prosperine first awakens. Anemone fulgens on some wet day in October pushes her little green hand through the soft earth and beckons—she ushers in the coming year —but it will be February before her intense scarlet flowers, glowing with underworld fire, warm the cold wind with thoughts of

summer sunshine. How well she looks with the grey lavender bushes at the back of her, and the grey-green woolly thyme for a carpet to dance on! There she will dance and play for many weeks, a ray of dazzling light.

She has beckoned to her sisters, anemone coronaria, who live in the clefts of the stones and in a large border in full sunshine. They have frilled green petticoats and buxom faces, with parasols of many bright colours. They dance in the wind on their long stems, even enjoying a tussle with boisterous gales. When the wind blows or a cloud passes or evening falls, they shut their parasols, but in sunshine spread them wide. When quite young they bend their heads down shyly, but are really tomboys at heart, as you find later.

Daffodils love the shelter of the big lavender bushes. Wind and sunshine are not to their taste, and they have a well-bred fashion of acting all just alike. They all turn exactly towards the sun, and exactly in the same attitude. They are exquisitely beautiful and high-minded and pure, as their pale gold and white dresses testify.

Also in shade a tiny mountain hepatica, brought from the Riviera, pierces the earth, opening her blue eyes full of wonder, and near her the dainty Siberian scilla, intensely blue.

So low, it is almost overlooked, the dog-tooth violet ventures to look above its mottled leaves. Alpine pinks and phloxes spread their green mossy carpets with myriad blossoms. Spears of iris pierce their covering of thymes, and aquilegias shake out their dainty fronds. From stony clefts the earliest mossy saxifrages raise lofty plumes of waxen flowers, and the velvet edging of saxifraga cæspitosa bordering the path is smothered in white wreaths.

Snowdrop anemones in shaded ledges droop their graceful heads, and the meleager fritillary emerges from the earth with head bent almost under the stalk. Her strange uncanny grace suggests a cynical suspicious mind, and the æsthetic selection of her curious purple and black brocade, I fear, has been adopted only in order to lurk unseen where she may spy upon her neighbours.

I always invite her to my garden, because wicked people have a peculiar interest.

Anemone fulgens, and in the herbaceous border Bracteata poppy, sound the cymbals and the big drum to usher in the symphony of summer, but in April we have the violets, for, except where the roses live apart, all the garden is blue.

Veronica spicata, who has crept over a heap of miserable stones covering all with rich evergreen, in June sends up her spires of richest blue. Hers is a mind that, from the humblest place, has reached the very soul of truth. Another veronica, with leaves in silvery-grey rosettes, has sprays of paler blue. She is less humble and devout, but good.

Aquilegia glandulosa lives at the moist foot of the rockery, screened by taller plants. There, on single stems, rise her flowers of chiselled form most wonderful in balance of curves, and tinted with the blue of stars and the white of moonlight. No flower more lovely blooms upon the earth, though her fair sisters come near to her. Some of them have more confidence and pride, and lift their elegant heads upon airier stems. I

love the lady in pale violet and yellow. Her father is the orange and yellow Canadian flinging out long branches that sweep a couple of yards with profusion of yellow and orange blossoms. Cœrulia, her mother, all in clearest blue, came from the Rocky Mountains; a creature of strength and grace. It seems to me the crowning-point of the summer when they bloom, and as if violin tones of a distant orchestra vibrated in the warm air. They, too, will go all too soon, but then iris, Spanish and English, unfurl their standards in richest harmonies of blue and purple, lavender bristles with its army of little spears, each bud jewelled with pale sapphires set in green bronze. Thyme is covered with deepest crimson or white blossoms, and in the farther border where anemone coronaria romped in March, are now the great brotherhood of noble delphiniums. Dark blue, sky-blue, blue veiled in violet gauze, blue with a white eye, or sky-blue black-eyed, all gleaming tall and stately and seen on a background of sunlit grass or rising up in blue spires against the very sky, blue upon blue air.

I love to sit under the dark yew in dense shade and let my eye travel over the wonderful scale of blue and green colour from the lavender bushes across the iris and thymes to the distant clump of Delphiniums. One clump of white lilies is the highest note in the scale: if the form were less lovely she should go. Blues seem more infinitely varied than any other colours, and there is at once serenity and peace and faith in blues.

On the top of the farthest rock garden some yuccas with their upright swords form a rearguard. I like these fierce harsh plants bristling with antagonism, solitary, hard-hearted. And like to them are the saxifrages which cover all the stony bank below with little rosettes of green bronze encrusted with silver. They absorb the substance and nature of the rock on which they live, and yet some day, some other year (there is the charm of expectation and hope deferred about it), from the hard heart of these little earth-bound rosettes will spring forth a spray of most tender blossoms. The yuccas too, from their clump of bayonets, will, some

day, fling out their spire of bells eight or ten feet high. How wonderful it will be! But when? It is six years now that I have wondered what the bloom will be. They are a pleasant masculine troop, stern and strong in contrast to the many flowers of feminine character.

Who can think of the tall herbaceous phloxes, blooming in autumn in that shady border, as other than young girls? Tall and slender of body, swaying and graceful in movement, with rounded fair cheeks, some pale, some rosy; but their bloom is always like a soft young cheek, fragrant and cool. The spaces between them are filled with pansies who rise early in Spring and look up with honest, unsentimental, merry faces. "*Johnny-jump-up*" was the name we called them in childhood, and they still remind me of the first infinite miracle of seed and flower which was unfolded in my childhood's garden fifty years ago.

A few flowers are exceedingly selfish and grasping, ready to overgrow their neighbours or to undermine them in unseen, sneaking fashion, sending out grasping feelers to

snatch the coveted place. These are never satisfied. Give them the dry earth and a bushel of stones. How wonderful is the whole family of thistles, with its taste for travel! How adventurously their children spread out silken balloons and sail down the boisterous September gale to seek new homes!

Of all flowers the rose is the most complex individual. Each rose has its own ideas and whims. Great ladies they are, hiding sharp sarcasm and often a policy of pin-pricks under most beautiful calm faces, but unfolding in the heart of their mystery some rapturous dream never attained. Theirs is the languor of high breeding, and the repose and calm of weary idleness.

Some few, like the crimson rambler, are gay cavaliers, riding with spur and lance and banner far beyond their boundaries. The wild rose and the sweet-briar are country ladies unspoiled by the ways of the world. This is what we all feel about them, but those courtly dames have always the greater fascination of gentle manner—with

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the exciting possibility of a scratch of sarcasm.

The path to my studio traversed the whole length of this fascinating flower-land, and never, in winter or in summer, could I reach the place of my proper work without seeing by the way something that claimed immediate care.

In winter there was, of course, anxiety about frost and damp, the airing and protection of rose cuttings and carnations. Then came the time of weeds, and later seedlings to prick off, or the ravages of greenfly and caterpillar to be checked, or faded blossoms to be culled; or some favourite plant, by drooping head and pale foliage, made a sudden gesture of despair, the cause of which had to be found at once. On other occasions some delicate little plant was suddenly seen crushed by overbearing neighbours, or a gust of wind set the rose-branches spearing one another, or nearly carried the slender lilies off their feet. What could I do but cover and weed and clip, spray and tie and dig? Then, too, my pet robin began following me about,

and, later on, a bullfinch and a wren, and all the young robins, requiring many attentions. The journey down that path of only thirty yards could never be covered in less than two hours, even without the slightest digression to outlying plantations. In time this pathway became like the road to hell—paved with good intentions.

How often, when lamps were lighted and drowsy indoor warmth disabled me from doing tardily what the morning had appointed, I upbraided myself for a day wasted, and resolved to do quite differently on the morrow; but with to-morrow came a fresh crop of temptations.

At last it occurred to me to weigh in the balance the whole duties of an artist against those of a gardener, and, to my surprise, I found the latter far more important, their rewards a hundred-fold greater, and the garden our greatest teacher of colour, of composition, and of form.

For people who are not painters and have not this good reason for garden devotion, I have codified a set of excuses, adapted to most circumstances, which will enable them

to argue their conscience into silence and literally to turn over a new leaf.

Sunday.—You may work in the garden, because it is not really work, but all happiness and holiness. Draw the line at digging.

Monday.—Work all day in the garden, so as to have it off your mind for the rest of the week.

Tuesday.—Continue to work in the garden, because this is early in the week. Time enough for other things to-morrow.

Wednesday.—Begin the other things, but bring your reading or sewing into the garden, where you may enjoy it as a background. It will immediately become a foreground.

Thursday.—Work in the garden because you did not yesterday.

Friday.—Work in the garden to make it quite tidy by the end of the week, as you don't intend to touch it on Sunday.

Saturday.—Work in the garden, because it is a holiday, and you will do as you like.

When quite well and happy, work in the garden because you are glad.

When weary and heartsick, work in the garden because it will rest you.

When it rains, work in the garden because then is the time to plant and weed.

When the winds blow, work now to save the slender stalks from breaking.

When there is drought, work in the garden to save your plants.

When it is winter, work now to give sheltering care.

When it is spring, work in the garden because everybody does.

When it is summer, live in the garden to enjoy the fruits of your labour.

When it is autumn, work in the garden, because now is the time to transplant, divide, and multiply, and to lay down in the earth the glories for next summer.

If there is any other time when you cannot find an excuse for working in the garden, remember that it was the first duty and place of man, and that there is no philosophy of life, no beauty of art, which has not its seed in the earth or can flourish without knowledge of a garden. What, indeed, was

the punishment of Adam and Eve but to be driven out of their Eden?

I love to walk round my little garden late in the evening among those shy flowers who shrink away from the sun and open at twilight their vases of exquisite perfume.

Œnothera macrocæpa holds up pale golden cups to catch the dew. There is Matthiola, so humble and insignificant by day, and only after night has fallen does her perfume from yon shady place like a melody of the nightingale fill the quiet air. The tobacco plant, too, suddenly shines out with widely expanded tubes, and is a fountain of delicious scent.

Like these are the flowers of winter that do not shrink from the dark season of the year, its stiff frosts, or biting winds. In December and January we gather helleborus or Christmas rose as beautiful as the hothouse camelia. Then, too, leafless branches of winter jasmine are covered with pale yellow stars. In the wind-swept hedgerows the wild clematis still wears garlands of its gauzy seed-vessels, more beautiful than its flowers and glimmering

in pallid winter days like ghosts of summer. The snowdrop, as soon as the icy grip of frost suddenly relaxes, raises her white bud in its sheath of young leaves, and winter aconite is a gleam of frosty sunshine.

. . . . . .

Perfume seems to be the voice of the flowers; with it they call to the bee and moth, or speak perhaps to each other. Though they have thoughts and nerves, and are sensitive to the gentlest touch, perhaps they have not sight. Each one growing upwards towards the light and turning to the source of life may be only conscious of herself. Each one in the crowded garden all alone with God.

That phrase is often used by old Irish-women who are widows and alone in their little huts. Many said to me that they were *all alone with God*, with such pathos that the irresistible inference was that they did not enjoy the company.

Not so the flowers. Theirs is the joyous unity with the life of the universe, unfolding each one the marvellous thought impressed in its tiny seed, sounding clearly

that one note of the mighty harmony which was entrusted to its keeping.

One who has lived among them and with no other companions becomes like them, conscious only of light and growth towards it; like them patiently waiting for summer to follow winter, for life renewed to follow death; and realises the joy and love of the Creator in His creation. This joy of creation, of thought becoming form and life in infinite design and beauty: has not here and there a human being been allowed to taste this divine joy and thereby been made more especially in the likeness of God?

MY DOG

CHAPTER IV

DOGGEREL

HIS chapter is devoted to my dog. It is a sad chapter, for the dog proved faithful and human beyond words, and its mistress but a faithless cur. It is the only friendship which I deserted, and even now the bond may be renewed if the dear creature will forgive.

It began with a tramp. A big, bold, burly tramp who knocked at the kitchen door and demanded broken china to rivet. Now the maid who then served me was that sort of maid who runs very fast when carrying a tray, looking backward meanwhile, thus causing many things of brittle nature to fly off and break. If she carried a chair from one room to the next she would hold it horizontally so that either legs or back could not get through the door,

and her impetus did not allow her to stop though legs or back fell off! Therefore was she glad to find a tramp ready to repair, and handed to him a vegetable dish with a division piece in the middle that her strong hand had disconnected. Later, the bold, bad tramp reappeared at the front door and demanded 2s. 6d. for putting in a rivet. This he had done by drilling a hole through the bottom of the dish, which would consequently leak, and the condition thereof be worse than before. I explained that sixpence was the usual price of a rivet. He returned the message that that rivet was of an extraordinary kind, which indeed it was, for with thumb and finger I straightway picked it out and returned it. Whereupon he became furious. I sent word he could have one shilling—no more. His fury became a hurricane, and he deposited the rivet on a window-sill, demanding half-a-crown or his permanent company. I drew my bolts and despatched the nimble maid over the fields, back of the cottage, in search of the policeman, while I retired to the upper floor, keeping watch over the excited

man, and feeling like the solitary defender of a fortress. From behind my thin curtains I could look calmly down upon the enemy, who grew with every breath redder and louder. From above I announced that the shilling was ready for him, but a witness would be required to the payment. It was the hour when men should return from the fields and pass my door, but never had they seemed so slow, and meanwhile the foe announced that he adhered to the demand for 2s. 6d., and that he was prepared to use bad language if refused. No doubt he had a grand vocabulary in this kind of language, for his words came faster and fiercer; but what did it profit him? It is a fine thing to have command of language. It is a fine thing to fling winged words upon the stillness of a summer afternoon; but if they are words that no one understands, of what use? Study language by all means; but if you speak German to a Chinese, or Arabic to an American, or bad language to a lady, it is really a waste of feeling to resent that she cannot understand. Some of his words, such as 'bloody' and

'd——' I had known about. They are sometimes seen in print in *Punch*, and a big D even played an important part in a celebrated opera. These I knew, but the next of his remarks was of no meaning. His face grew so red in this effort that I feared an attack of apoplexy, and calmly and gently looked out of my window and softly begged him not to tire himself—which only made him the more furious. A full half-hour had passed and still no policeman—no swift maid to herald his coming. The village women had hurried away from the terrible roar of the tramp, and left me to my solitary defiance. I hoped they would tell the nearest farmer, but hoped in vain. When the labourers passed from the fields the tramp bellowed out for his half-crown. When there was no one to witness he would accept a shilling, but I knew would afterwards demand more. It is curious what a sense of superiority is found in a mind *conscia sibi recti.*

I felt quite unruffled, and only anxious for his health and escape from fits, while he continued to bellow the louder to the great injury of his voice.

At last, what is this? A little skirmish of petticoats bringing news of relief! Some village women—not venturing too near—call out he is coming, the policeman is coming, and the steady unhurrying steps of the well-shod man of law ring down the flinty road. "Chuck it out, chuck it out," roars the tramp; so, having witnesses to my payment, out of the window I chucked the shilling wrapped in white paper, to mark its flight. Quick the man snatched it up and scuttled up the hill at a good pace, saving his breath for the steep climb.

A holy silence fell on the hot July evening, and a languor of fatigue possessed my wearied ears. The wretch well out of sight, a number of defenders and sympathisers appeared who had been unaccountably invisible through the brunt of the fray; and I could only feel thankful that bad language had not been included in my early studies, as for once want of knowledge proved a safe thing. There must be a dog, said the farmers. Certainly a lone woman must have a dog, but waiting for them to hear of a desirable canine protector I proceeded to the shop,

bought the largest pair of hobnail shoes on the premises, put in old laces, and dragged them in mud. Made properly crusty and worn looking, they stood for many a day just outside the kitchen door waiting to be cleaned, and struck terror into all travellers.

A few days after, a dog was announced. A beautiful creature, my friendly farmer said. "It will lie quietly and never disturb your painting, and you can have it for half-a-guinea; it's master was parting with it because it was of no use with cows. It had only one fault—it's a female." Dear me, I thought, here too even in the animal world are women folks at a discount? poor dear, let her come to me. I quite sympathise with her feminine view of cows. So she came. Lady by name, fine lady by character. Of course she would not herd cows. A creature of greyhound and deerhound breed! Believe me, the mixed race enhanced her charms of character and intelligence. Her beautiful large eyes had the deepest gaze, and how pretty her little velvet ear! Her mouth could open almost as wide as a crocodile's,

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Art Repro. Co., ph., sc. Noon in the Rock Garden.

displaying a set of terrible ivories, alarming indeed to those who knew her not. So tall was she, able to stand with a paw on my shoulder and lick my cheek. Dear Lady, how often she took this engaging familiarity, gazing me eye to eye, transferring her thoughts to mine and entreating compliance! All day we worked together in the studio, I standing, Lady on a soft rug stretched at length, eyes fixed upon me, waiting. I stand at my easel, but sometimes, very rarely, sit down for a minute, not so much for rest as for reflection. On these occasions Lady quickly would have her elbows on my lap and her face close to mine, with a lick too affectionate to be altogether forbidden, and saying in her gaze language: "How much longer this stupid painting?" At four o'clock we had our tea together on the lawn, Lady had a large cup, just like mine, and bread and butter, her favourite meal. This consumed, painting was intolerable to her. The beautiful hour was approaching, the breeze from the hill bore the fragrance of the down, and perhaps some sniff of rabbits and hares in their pleasant upland

haunts. Lady would not let me go back to studio painting. At full height on end, with paws on my shoulders, she would bar the way to the studio, and the dark eyes meant "Come away up the hill, away to the common on the woods. Come away, come away," and I promised. Then she watched at the door while I prepared my light sketching materials, and off we went. Never was there such an ill-assorted couple. A little elderly lady, decidedly thick for her height, fat and scant of breath, laden with paint-box and brushes, perhaps a pole-easel and umbrella. This little, burdened, short creature, somewhat tired too with having stood already seven hours at the easel, coupled with a hound built for the extreme of swiftness, every muscle perfect to its use, bounding and joyous after long idleness. A pure joy to leap the gate backwards and forwards, circling around me like a gull on the wing around a panting steamship. On like an arrow, then back again to encourage me, and with a flying caper to lick off my eyeglass perhaps—a terrible mishap, but forgiven. Many the mile we walked thus

together. But the dear dog never realised how many and many a time her poor mistress came home tired out and exhausted with a modest five-mile run, the merest stroll. A great inducement to the walk was to watch her graceful movement, the exquisite curve of her bounding form, the flexibility, the ease, the grace. What a wonderful thing to be so made for speed and beauty! The dear creature commiserated my slowness, and often returned to keep close and pace demurely at my side, with affectionate inquiring eyes uplifted, and obedient to the softest word. At the approach of people or vehicles she instantly drew beside me and assumed the air of guardian. No one then seeing her could have guessed that she was thinking chiefly of rabbits. Her real plan in these excursions was to find a nice place for me to establish the easel, open the umbrella, and take out the paints. While these preparations were being completed she lay on the velvety turf, basking in contentment and absorbed in my arrangements; but the sketch begun, she gradually changed her position so

as to be behind me, and give the flattering impression that she watched the progress of the picture. Sometimes she strayed a little farther just to take a view from the higher path, but flew back on my lightest call. At last when I really grew intent with both eyes on my work, her little digressions were unnoticed, and then silently on tiptoe, not so much as stirring a dead leaf and carefully keeping to the noiseless turf, away went Lady.

What has possessed that wheatfield? Is it a wind rustling the ripening corn. What a curious ripple it has far down the valley. How swiftly in circles and eddies flows the curious wave, and now, good heavens! there is the bounding Lady in the midst of the whirlpool of rustling corn, springing entirely above it, just to take an observation, and then diving below. Oh, if only I could whistle; but I can't. To call "Lady, Lady," at the top of my voice will only carry the news of her delinquency to every farmhouse in the valley. In this still air, when the fields are growing and labour at rest, a whisper can be heard for miles.

"Oh Lady, Lady, how unkind of you, you little cheat; you dreadful dog, come back and don't disgrace me. Dear Lady, oh dear dog, come back." A poor flying hare darts out of the hedge over the road past me through another hedge, and Lady after it, deaf now to all entreaty. Could I expect a human in the hour of success to throw up the game? The poor hare doubles again through the briars and Lady too, and quickly the chase is ended. I hide my eyes while the triumphant dog endeavours dutifully to bring me her present of game. "Foolish person," she thinks, "who cares not for the fine supper provided." Luckily the postman is just coming up the hill and a labourer from the opposite direction. They receive the half-dead hare and quickly end its pain, and will give it to its rightful owner. But that's a good dog, they say, a fine dog; and Lady, conscious only of a success which few hounds single-handed can achieve, comes to me radiant for approval. Dear Lady—can I scold her? She has spent half her young life acquiring this very accomplishment, and she brought her booty faithfully

home. Dear dog, don't do it again! And so the next time we go afield I must carry a chain, and the only post to fasten it to happens to be my own ankle. It is quite inconvenient to both of us. Lady alternates patience with entreaties. When I am balanced on a very small folding seat, with a palette on my thumb and a brush in the other hand, a little upsetting easel in front, it is not a well-chosen moment for a dog of that size to climb to my lap. There is no place to put down my brushes and colours, so we all upset together, and come out of it considerably variegated from the palette. A general cleaning wastes much more of the beautiful afternoon, and then we begin again—Lady fast to my foot. The farmer who had introduced her rides by and stops to approve. "If you want a good dog, you must never be separated from it."

What, never? My heart does sink a little at the thought that in taking this dear companion for protection against tramps, I am really chaining myself to the dog. Tramping is not at all suited to my physique, and now even my sketches must be made far

from any tempting cover. It is a duty no doubt, when one belongs to an animal, to serve it faithfully. "The weak are ever the masters of the strong," is an old saying; and here Lady must be the weaker, for clearly she is the master. She has also a silent contempt for my painting that is really discouraging. For many months together I see no one but Lady, have no other friend at hand, and naturally it is depressing to have my constant occupation considered so foolish. She certainly does think it foolish, and lies there gazing at me, thinking: "Foolish, foolish mistress, is it trying to copy God's works you are? give it up. There's no sunlight in your colours—nothing but petroleum and dirty paint: throw away this thin image; come into the real fields up the hillside, close to the hedge fragrant with honeysuckle and sweetbriar. I'll show you where partridges are hiding; I'll startle them out of their cover in the growing corn. Come up to the common where the last sunlight lingers; the rabbits are venturing out into the dusk to bite the dewy grass. We will rush in among them like a tempest and

scatter them to the winds. Grand fun it is; but one or two I'll catch for our supper." The entreating eyes said all this and made me obey in all points, save the catching of a rabbit. A little chase sometimes I'd allow when the game was there in hundreds, for on such occasions they always got off. The multitude seemed bewildering, or perhaps the dog only enjoyed scattering them.

In these long walks I realised the troubles and cares of guardian angels, and often thought of them with sympathy and commiseration. It must be hard on an angel to have a pet human and be bound to follow him everywhere on foot or in thought—to be always there saying: "Don't, don't." Think what a lot this must be for one of the heavenly choir. A human child or even man, like the hound, would fain dart away after every wild hare that crosses its path, and perhaps is less obedient than the hound to the voice of the master. Lady would pace by my side, stepping on tiptoes in the softest place to make no sound, quivering from nostril to tip of tail with eagerness to be off—bunnies on all sides feeding on the

grassy lanes, skipping in and out of the copse and bracken; but always she obeyed my voice which gently said, "No, dear dog, not now—no—keep close." She would walk through a warren and touch nothing if I kept repeating my caution. The position of guardian angel is, however, fatiguing, and there were occasions when other thoughts pre-occupied me. Not her fault, poor dog, but mine that she sometimes fell into temptation. Do the angels bear the blame of our lapses?

More and more hypnotic influence was acquired by Lady. She dined at my table on gooseberry tart, omelettes, and curry. Did you ever taste dog biscuits? Their insipidity is an insult to a canine epicure. In the evening she lay on a small Chippendale settee, and I sat beside her holding her hand. She had a comfortable bedroom and a proper bed spread with a sheet. My friends, the few that I saw at long intervals, got an impression that my table-talk was all doggerel, and did not hesitate to speak slightingly of my better self. They saw perhaps that, like one in a trance, I could not choose but do her will.

There came at last an unavoidable separation. I was obliged to leave England for six months, and a kind friend who kept a carriage offered to receive as a guest the personage called my tyrant. We started in the train together. Lady had forebodings, and she pressed close to my side. At last at the junction, with one sorrowing embrace, I handed her chain to a porter. The tears were on my cheek, and on hers, dear Lady!

There was not a day of my long absence that was not cheered by thoughts of her gentle affection, and yet a certain sense of repose and freedom, quite new, was perceptibly, palpably felt. How pleasant to hold a book without that black little nose immediately shoving it away! Quite a comfort to sew occasionally; and as for pictures, a great many ideas came to me, and I could really concentrate attention upon such work.

As months went by and former habits were resumed, and the thread of earlier life was taken up, it seemed sometimes a pity that a person of some little attain-

ment and education should be directed by a dog; but still I longed to see her again, remembered daily more of the grace and charm, forgot my fetters. So soon as I reached home, dear Lady was sent for. Glad she was to see me; ran at once to the grass, where she rolled as was her wont to be brushed. For she always had ordered me to spend half-an-hour of the best morning light brushing and polishing her coat. The old life began again at once just where we had broken off.

But here is my humiliation—it was I who failed. It was I, alas! who called it slavery, and talked in my mind about ambition, pictures, nay, work and livelihood itself sacrificed to humour a dog: something within me had changed—fickleness—alas!

When it was known that I wished to part with my Lady every labourer in the village offered to keep her. She was, indeed, a valuable helpmate for any one who relished rabbit or hare, but Lady returned to the kind friend with the carriage. It is the carriage and the horse that she loves;

she will not step inside the house or make friends with her mistress. Poor dog. No doubt she fears we are all fickle; but I long to see her, and perhaps we might pull together again.

Another dog has come to live here and frighten tramps. A useful little dog, who is always amused and needs no companionship. He plays with other dogs—of the nicer sort—and lives in the kitchen, and in winter days he trots down to the shop where many dogs assemble to discuss affairs and make notes of passers-by. I have nothing to say to him. No new dog-friendships for me!

MY NEIGHBOURS

CHAPTER V

MY NEIGHBOURS

ONE of my desires was to establish a beehive. Of course I made a mistake, as usual, through ignorance. If there is anything that I take pains to avoid it is unnecessary collision with well-established superstitions. On no account would I see the new moon through glass or put my boots on a table, or wear an opal or mend a dress while wearing it; dress my left foot first, or walk under a ladder; but I was ignorant of the fact that a swarm of bees will never have luck if you buy it. Not only did I pay seven shillings and sixpence for my swarm, but it was already the month of June, when every one knew, except myself, that a "swarm of bees in June is not worth a tune."

My heart warmed to the little creatures.

In earliest childhood I had learned their national anthem, "How doth the little busy bee," and figuratively sat at their feet. Now I did so literally. I delighted to sit on the grass, my near-sighted eyes on the level of their table, within a few inches of their door. The bees came and went on their business, buzzing around my head, but never stinging me. Sometimes they alit on my fingers, or allowed me the pleasure of assisting them when they dragged out of the hive bodies of dead bees—slain enemies or thieves, perhaps, cast out of their gates. Occasionally, I brought them flowers until it was evident they did not care for plucked flowers. I delighted to feel their noisy crowds circling around me, coming home laden or sailing away free as air. Towards August the stinging sweet odour of their honey-store could be smelled afar. When winter began, we thatched their cop warmly and half closed the door with clay, making sure that they had ample store of food. They could be heard murmuring in their hived winter sleep, snoring heavily it seemed. Soon I discovered that

they were not well placed, for the winter sun had turned far away from us; so table and hive were moved to the sunniest position, and yet the bees slept on.

On a warm day in February the distant woods flushed with pink buds. Nut trees, in sheltered places up the hill, unfurled their tassels and sent a fragrant message to the torpid insects, who straightway awoke and darted forth to the distant woods, whose subtle perfume was imperceptible to human sense. In such haste they sallied forth that they did not observe the changed location of their hive and returned to its former place, buzzing long and angrily against the wall where it had stood. As the afternoon turned cold and damp many fell exhausted, but I gathered them gently from the ground and carried them to their own door, where they revived and crawled in. Gradually others came home unaided; but why could they not scent their home as easily as the distant flowers? They did not make the mistake again.

As spring advanced they streamed out in every sunny hour and sipped the banquet

lavishly offered. By May their store of honey was so great that they no longer had room to sleep under the cop, but clustered together outside, clinging one to another on the edge of their table in a dense festoon. It amused me to stroke them and see all their wings lift as my hand passed over them, though they still clung together undisturbed.

The knowing ones told me that "A swarm in May is worth a load of hay," so I made expensive preparations for the new swarm, bought them a new basket cop, duly smeared inside with honey, and set it on another table conveniently near. Several days passed, but they took no notice whatever of this provision for their comfort. I resolved to call their attention to it and, so to speak, get my hay in. One evening when their curious festoon was established as usual and it was quite dark—for they do not like to fight in the dark—I took them in both hands and thrust them under the despised cop. They made a fierce, furious noise, but in darkness I ran away.

Next morning an angry troop of soldiers

was waiting at my door. The moment I entered the garden they fell upon me. They tangled themselves in my hair, and crept viciously even under my eye-glasses. I covered my eyes with my hands while they chased me indoors, stinging again and again. For days I could not cross the garden, even by the path farthest from their fortress, without being attacked and bayoneted by a troop of savage pickets. As their revenge showed no sign of relenting, I called in the village bee-keeper and regretfully smoked them out. They had laid up a huge store of honey and wax enough to polish my floors for several years, but they never had the least gratitude or respect for my suzerainty. They seemed to have had a quite overweening pride in their industry, and no idea of the foolishness of overproduction or the usefulness of leisure. It is well known that in two thousand years they have not developed the slightest improvement in their style of building. Is that a sign of intelligence? Would it not be wiser to idle in the shining hours which only a thoughtless bee would improve? Why not lie in the

grass and inhale the perfume of flowers without prying into their honey-cups? The poor bee feels obliged to live up to his reputation by gathering honey all the day, perpetually propounding his laborious theories while storing up the stickiest mess that ever gave an indigestion.

Moths are my friends; they flutter silently with muffled wing in the cool evening, sip from the most fragrant flowers that only then open their gold and silver cups. Moths carry not away from the banquet pockets full of sweets, like children from a Christmas party. In that shady corner under the pergola, at twilight, night-scented stock pours out a gush of perfume so that the gentle moth may find her flowers even in the dark. For them the sweet tobacco plant suddenly opens its silken pipes, filling the air with spicy fragrance, and, down on the border, by the shaded grass walk, the great, pale evening primroses lift up their fresh golden bowls like glowing moons. There is no noise in soft moth wings, and no fretful industry or self-consciousness. Thank Heaven, they are not setting an example! When the moths

come out the bees have gone to bed. Many swarms of bees have come without invitation, but not to my hive. They are lodged in the space between the inner and outer walls of my timber studio. When you pass near you can hear them still buzzing in their dreams, singing their little hymn. This little building must be quite interlined with honeycomb. Bees belonging to several cottagers take note of my garden, and scouts of an intervening swarm always look for a crevice in the studio wall. On a particularly bright May morning the air will be suddenly thick and dark with a whirring swarm, and a sound like the boiling of a vast kettle fills the air. At first we used every exertion to hive them, and restore them to their rightful owners. Gongs and kettles were beaten, turpentine was sprayed on the wall, branches of elder waved, and yet they were sure to be nicely settled in a chink, quite high up under the eaves, by the time some stumpy old woman, puffing and panting, had come in search of them. This happened a dozen times every summer. Ladders would be fetched, and veils and gloves and straw bee-

cops; but the queen, once safely ensconced, would not be lured out. Once a straw hive, well smeared with honey, was hung under the eaves just over the crevice which the swarm was frequenting, but as their great authority said nothing about their duty to masters, they preferred to remain in the wall. Later a sparrow made her nest in the cop, and, when the nestlings were hatched and chirping for food in their innocent way, the cruel bees attacked them. Terrible was the fluttering of the parent birds. They overturned the hive, and the poor naked nestlings were pitched out, still cruelly pursued by the bees until done to death. By-and-by, when this same swarm had stored their spacious domain with the plunder of my flowers, the owner, whom they had deserted, asked leave to take them. One evening, after sunset, he gave the busy-bodies the benefit of a sulphur taper, and, in order to reach the honeycomb, impudently proceeded to remove the outer timbers of my wall. It was built outside of round fir poles with the bark on, overlapping each other, and some yards of these were removed before the mass of comb and honey

could be reached. Several pails were filled with it, and a great deal was spilled over the wood and on the inside between the double walls. Darkness came on before the fir poles could be replaced.

Next morning a gay and festive throng filled the air, and battened upon the feast that was left for them. No toilers these, but the gayest and merriest marauders, reaping where they had not sown; gaily dressed they were in smart suits of shiny brown laced with gold, soldier-like and trim, quite as beautiful as their humble, industrious cousins; but as they were not constrained by an exalted reputation, they frankly enjoyed life with the gayest. For days they crowded the garden, feasting on what had been so lavishly prepared, but not allowing my poor house to be rebuilt. They also found wall-fruit just ripened to their taste, and revelled upon it until autumn frost, and then where went they? Well, next summer they came again, even though they did not store up provisions.

There is something very terrible in the so-called social life of bees. They are ex-

actly the type, by absolute subordination of individual life or love to mere useless industry, to which human socialists must tend. Love they have none. They organise a swarm with the pure indifference of political economists, fitting their larva by specialised food for its appointed usefulness, one to be a queen mother, many to be workers, some soldiers, some fathers; and when their usefulness is over, and they would be idle mouths in the hives, inexorably they sting to death, or drive them out of the cosy, warm house to perish slowly of frost and loneliness. No object have they but to store honey, just exactly as was done centuries ago by their forebears. No time for the individual to plan a new pattern of wax, or build it up into fantastic shapes after his own ideals. No individual life, for that is quite forbidden them. Perhaps in some of these swarms are the souls of ancient societies of that social craze, reduced now to mere insect body, sufficiently good for civic life, which dwarfs and stereotypes the individual. Surely if one wants to be a socialist, a hive can offer all the oppor-

tunity required. After all, what is the end of the bees' industry—of them who store more than they need, and give nothing to the imagination, to love, or to idleness? A wasps' banquet—indigestive syrup and wax for floor-polish!

Ants are to me far more respectable. Keeping their cities out of sight and courting no publicity, they go on their ways without noise, and have not been injured by praise. When by chance the spade is driven into one of their busy settlements what a world full of human feeling is unearthed. In the great earthquake they endeavour to save their little ones, and crowded troops are seen hurrying away bearing tiny white bundles, babies in swaddling-clothes, in their arms. And how wonderfully they disperse in the loosened soil, finding perhaps some refuge. Poor little things! Let us not be too curious or perhaps they, too, may begin to pose for admiration.

Until I came to live in this cottage starlings were quite unknown to me, except he of the "Sentimental Journey" who said "I can't get out." That bird always touched

my sympathy; and, for his sake, when a pair of starlings selected my new thatched studio roof to nest in, they found a cordial welcome. As they busied themselves in preparations and pulled out the straw of my nest, I kindly looked on without remonstrance, waiting to hear them reply in English to my many kind remarks. They wrought a long, large tunnel in the straw roof, and must have made a snug little place on the south slope of the gable, well sheltered on the east by the close fur robe of the yews. They very quickly understood my liking for them, but made no progress towards speech save certain expressive notes rather like the hee-haw of a donkey with a curious inflection and an added syllable, as if they said hey-diddle-dee, high-diddle-dee. To one of my village callers I said cheerfully that I felt quite at home since the little new studio had already found favour with the birds. "A pair of starlings have already begun to build there." "Oh, I daresay," was the dry unsympathetic response. What could it mean? The starlings being comfortably settled were quiet for a while. At times their glossy coats,

metallic blue in the sunshine, glistened darkly in the paddock where they looked for food. Top-heavy birds they are with short tails, so that they fly rather awkwardly, but run about quickly in the long grass. Others of the tribe soon flocked to join the new settlement, and on the south side the thatch roof was quite pigeon-holed, or starling-holed, with various family mansions. Sparrows also came, and every nook into which they could squeeze on the upright walls was filled with rude nests. This was less to my taste, for sparrows are only the street arabs of bird life. They are no builders, they have never learned to sing, they pull up and devour all the bright primroses and crocuses. They are always in mischief for pure enjoyment of it, and will even drive away the darling robin and wren. They have the sort of spirit which in some future life will evolve into a costermonger, and even now can fling chaff at each other like the cleverest little newsboys. As the summer advanced, the nests of my many guests were full of little strangers. Sparrows bawled out to each other "Last editions!" and all the latest accounts of the

market. Starlings came rushing through the air with yards of worms. It is true they could not speak with such freight in their beaks, but the young birds clamoured at the top of their voices, and swallowed their dinner at a gulp—to continue screaming. The parents administered indiscriminate slaps and scoldings all round before leaving for another foray. And how hard they worked! No one had time to say "I must get out." It was I who said it. It was no longer tolerable to stop inside the studio with this babble of screaming sparrows and hee-hawing starlings. The wooden ceiling on which their beds were made reverberated their cries like a sounding-board. "I must go out, I must go out," was my cry; but outside, when I stood to watch, there was instantaneous silence. It then occurred to me that each of these infant birds would next year, at latest, join the colony and excavate his own house and rear his own brood. It was easy to see that my roof would be perforated. Not for this was it built. A treat was provided for village boys, long ladders with a man to direct, and

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expert youngsters to go to the top. Twenty-eight nests they abstracted. Very ugly birds they are without their clothes, and it is a wonder how wide their bills can open and what a volume of sound they produce. Probably the sight of them suggested the invention of the bagpipe. At any rate seeing them so ugly hardened my heart. Beauty, not pity, is akin to love. I went out of hearing, and the youngsters put an end to this progeny. The eaves of the roof were repaired and bound with wire netting; silence reigns —and thankfulness.

Close to the studio door is a group of lofty yews. Once perhaps planted for an arbour, after centuries of neglect they have escaped from the reach of shears and that trim quaintness for which they were destined, and fling out their drooping branches from a great height. The old stems are full of sheltering little holes and cosy corners, the long strong branches sway gently on the breeze, and over all a thick mantle of soft, green fur shelters the inhabitants from summer's sun and winter's frost. The gracious shelter is even extended to the flower garden,

and on the south and east sides where the sun slants under, the first violets and daffodils bloom and the last Japanese anemones, and between times garlands and sprays of the daintiest columbines. On the shady side the ground is carpeted with woodruff and arabis and mossy saxifrage, and violets in between everywhere.

Overhead in the green roof is a veritable birdland. Many prefer to build their nests in low bushes or convenient hedges; but in winter, when all the Dryads have thrown away their greenery and are locked in their winter sleep, the Druids, these old yews, spread wide their heavy fur robes and give a night's shelter to all the cold little birds. They provide, too, a fine crop of scarlet berries that all enjoy. In summer the tiny crested wren will swing her nest from the highest branches. The wood-pigeon there has reared her twins silently, as Shakespeare knew; the little tree creeper has a tiny knot-hole for his family, and the woodpecker, too, and thrushes and wagtails and bullfinches. An owl lives aloft somewhere, never seen by daylight, but his weird uncanny laughter

peals out sometimes, when perhaps a little bird, hurrying to his work, has hustled against him and roused him from his noonday nap. His plumage matches the colour of the shadow where he sits, silent and almost indistinguishable, but where that horrid sarcastic laugh has once been heard birds will remember to keep far away. At night he comes forth, and flies very swiftly on most silent wings. He passes like a flash of shadow. Many is the nest of hedge-sparrows he had taken when the young birds were just fattened to his taste, and it must have been in his capacious maw that my first tame robin disappeared. Such a dear, innocent robin! Afterwards another came to me —it was the long drought of midsummer when our friendship began, which has lasted now to the third year. The earth was baked and worms in a corner when Robbie, barely fledged, flew down to the path at my feet, and from his tiny two inches of stature turned up to me his beseeching eye. This was the daring of despair. I spoke to him gently, and fetched crumbs and water. From that moment he was always at my side; would

fly eagerly to meet me in the morning, and accompany me to the studio, entering it with me. He flew from far off when called, even when plentiful autumn rains made his natural food abundant; if I was working out of doors, he would come quite close and speak to me. He had many intonations full of meaning, and he listened to my words appreciatively, for wild creatures like to be spoken to, and are most quickly tamed by the voice. I think our own words are more sensible to them than our attempts to imitate their notes. Robin, when he wanted a bath, led the way to the cistern, and required a soup plate full of fresh water, in which he revelled, even during December frost. He was always in and out of the studio investigating everything; when he found the door shut he uttered scolding notes, and he always sang his evening song under the porch. I was sorry that he discovered my looking-glass, and the robin who lived within it, a painful mystery to him. Again and again he came to look for that silent enchanted victim of black art, and sat gazing at it, uttering a low plaintive cry, one anxious note, while his

feathers were fluffed out like a cat's fur on end. The glass had to be covered. I loved that robin! When autumn days were cold and damp my door was still left open for his charming frequent visits; I feared to alarm him by keeping him shut in. Country people say a robin indoors before Christmas brings death. Strange superstition! Death must be pleasant that sends such a harbinger. In spring the red of his breast grew brighter, and he sang most joyously, but not to me. His eye gazed into distance, and his ear strained for a far-off reply.

Soon he brought another robin to share his crumbs, who accompanied him confidently into the studio, though her manner did not indicate interest in me. They evidently had talked about me, and she accepted his favourable report. They made a nest close by, where I often looked in. All day long he carried tiny mouthfuls to his mate, or sometimes, if a lavish feast was spread, would hurriedly bring her to make a meal. Soon both birds were flying incessantly from garden to nest, where four enormous mouths gaped, always waiting. My visits they did

not dislike; but one day some gentlemen, having tea on the lawn, noticed Robbie frequenting the table for bread and butter, and had to inspect his nest. Robbie is suspicious about gentlemen, and in a few hours had hustled his fledglings into the shelter of a hedge conveniently near the kitchen, where he did not hesitate to collect his supplies. The cook declared that he had great discrimination in butter, and would only take the fresh when nicely made into little pats for my table. He gave his little ones the greatest care, and instructed them in the arts of bird life. It was certainly exhausting work, and the amount of incessant feeding that young birds require amazed me. At last they all disappeared, and after a few days Robbie came home. The wife also retired to her separate estate, and Robbie, with tattered plumage, returned to his bachelor life, frequenting my society wherever I might be, with all his original friendliness, and allowing no other bird to approach. By the end of August he had a fine coat of new feathers, and took up singing again as a gentleman of leisure. I feel sure that his mate is the same

all the years. Last winter when I had to be away he was left on board wages. But a pretty story came to me: a deacon of the Church army was holding a meeting near my house when a robin flew down to his feet, and remained there quietly listening.

If you take an evening stroll up the little ravine that crosses at right angles the wide cultivated valley and ends in a deep notch cut into the shoulder of the big down, when you come to the copse at the bottom, do not go into it but climb instead up the grassy steep hillside, steep as our thatched roofs. There are little bushes of hawthorn and many rabbit-tracks, and near the top you find a narrow path like a shelf, where you may rest, looking over a vast cornfield and all the valley towards the west. Even though the copse down below is vague in dewy shadow, the sky is still radiant. When the last lark-song has suddenly fallen into the dewy meadow—fallen, like a sparkling fountain into its basin—stealthy rabbits will steal out to nibble the growing corn and little screaming swifts skim to and fro close to

the hillside down below your feet, or sometimes brush you as they turn, hawking for their prey of tiny gnats. Their fierce, little yell is one of the most savage notes in Nature.

Presently from the copse, if it is still early summer, float up the notes of the nightingale. In the stillness of the growing twilight he pours forth his rapturous melody. If he is silent a moment, a soft answer is heard from another wood far up the hill. Does he sing all night to warn off the owl? Even he must feed on the poor glow-worm or other soft creatures, for whom we feel little sympathy because we do not understand their style of beauty. Everything is really beautiful, but sometimes we are unable to appreciate it. We call the owl cruel when he eats our pets, and admire the beautiful little birds who devour thousands of young glow-worms or butterflies and slugs.

Why is cruelty so woven in the woof of life that all creatures live upon each other? "All things by a law divine in one another's being mingle." Though Shelley

did not intend it to be taken in this sense, the bodily mingling is very thorough. The thrush calling so musically from the pasture is really announcing a good catch, and in his own person is the embodiment of hundreds of lesser creatures. They enable him to live; but does their life become his life? As Englishmen, who eat so much mutton, are still far from lamblike, I think it is clear that the true life or character of the sheep has not remained in the mutton consumed, but is seeking a new incarnation, and may in time develop more admirable qualities. Surely the spirit lives and grows through many physical embodiments, and to lay down its temporary body for the use of others is only a temporary inconvenience and a worthy self-sacrifice. In all this passing and renewal of physical form, the continuation and development of the real life reconciles our ideal of the Creator and the Destroyer, the Vishnu and Shiva of the Buddhists united in one godhead, and the seeming cruelty of suffering and death disappears.

Will some peace-at-any-price man or

woman explain the war and the arms provided for the weakest of God's creatures? The meanest insect has its sting, and will select the birthplace of its swarming brood in the bud of a rose or an apple, destroying flower or fruit. Why have the vegetables no right of self-preservation? The smallest insects are fitted with weapons and poison, and a microbe slays the giant. Then there is the great tribe of horned cattle and deer whose food is all vegetable, yet they, too, are armed and prepared to do battle to the death with one another, and especially do they kill the old or ailing of their kind. The timid, soft rabbit has only his cunning, but he practises wanton cruelty towards the elders of his warren. When they are old and weak, the young rabbits fill up their holes and pen them in to starve, a lingering death. Even the robin — that most engaging and winning of all birds — so confiding, so friendly to men, is said to exercise his first lusty independent strength in killing the parents by whom he has been so devotedly nursed and fed. It is difficult to believe robins capable of such cruelty.

But where, indeed, are the old robins? So soon as the young birds are fledged the old birds disappear from the neighbourhood of their nest.

The blackbird is almost as easily tamed as the robin. Birds, who are all so vocal, like to be spoken to, and recognise readily the intonations of human language. The blackbird surprised on a flower-bed will fly away with a startled cry of "Oh, oh! look, look, look, look!" Speak to him, and he will stop on the top of a wall to listen and consider; in a few days he will reply with notes of heavenly melody. The blackbird's song is always full of variety and meaning. He talks like a child who has caught the general sound of language without dividing it in words. He has notes of exultation, of remonstrance, of fright, and I declare for a fact that when he saw me covering my strawberries with nets he jeeringly said, "Hump—well *I* don't care!" and flew away until the grapes ripened. But it is in spring that he sings his *Te Deum* on the top of a pear tree in bloom, and looks towards the setting sun. He

sings then, for the pleasure of the music and to pour forth the joy of his heart in thanksgiving.

From birds to worms is but a step, so I think next of a snug warm corner where cuttings of tea-roses are covered with a paper shade. Twice a day they are sprinkled, for it is essential to keep their leaves moist until fresh buds push and the cuttings are rooted. When I lift up the shades for this purpose, there, under the leaves, squats a huge toad, spotted, freckled, ugly—if anything is ugly. I am careful not to hurt his feelings, and always speak to him, calling him "Little friend," for such he is. He is never startled now. After dark, he often purrs a contented little song of one note, very like the murmuring of a dove. In that carefully moistened place, if nowhere else, the worms can push out their long necks in search of leaves. They would soon strip my rose-cuttings if hoppy were not there. At first glimpse of one of them his long tongue darts out like a lasso and the worm is incorporated n the toad.

One very sunny day a long, dry twig

disfigured the lawn. I stooped to pick it up, when a slight tremor betrayed the snake —very quietly it remained as if thinking its safety lay in pretending to be a stick, but as soon as I left it, intending to bring some food and cultivate acquaintance, it disappeared. Unfortunately, next morning, it ventured near the pump-house, and was chopped in two by a valiant cook. As she expected both its halves, or at any rate the head, to live and grow again, her victory does not seem advantageous.

I used to object to worms—probably because in very young days my Irish nurse, when questioned closely about death, had described that state thus: "*When you are dead you'll be put under the ground and the worms will eat you.*" "Is everybody going to die?" "Yes, all will die." Is it possible to describe the horror which this summary description of death poured through a child's life from the age of three years on for a long, long time? How long it takes before the day of peace arrives, as it does to all, when death is known to be only the ripening of the grain of the spirit,

when earth to earth is the unity of the universe, and when "*earth-worms with their velvet skins*" are the gentlest and most mysterious fellow-workers in the universal toil! Sometimes in darkening twilight, when the ground is moist and all winds are still, it is startling to see fallen leaves suddenly jump several inches; earthworms are drawing them to their holes to line those dark nests and pulverise them into food for the flowers of light.

There are other people who have been needlessly disliked. The objection to the crowing of cocks is quite classical, but our Norman ancestors appreciated their singing and gave them the name *Chant est clair*. Many great men have agreed with Carlyle in complaining of their disturbing cries, but have absolutely misunderstood their language. About London, perhaps, pent up in damp, dark, little backyards of suburban neighbourhoods, their voices may have acquired something harsh, and in the crude daylight they sometimes have a boastful tone; but I must tell simply what happened to me; how and for what I mistook them.

It had been a long day in June. All the daylight I had given to the enjoyment of painting, and, when lamps were trimmed after supper, about nine o'clock, I sat down to the real task of dressmaking. It is detestable work, but there are so many pleasant things to think about that I keep on and on, hardly knowing the hours that pass. I was beginning to feel a little tired when distant voices came to my ear. Very soft airy cries like treble voices, a number of people far off coming home, I thought. Then nearer were the voices, and distinctly they cried *Hallelujah*. The call was taken up near and far; from all the hillside and from the fields of the valley rang a soft musical call, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" until one could fancy angels alighting on the hill-tops singing joyous praise.

I drew the curtains; the first silver light of a new day spread over the valley and slumbering farms; while watchers of dawn, no better creatures than the barnyard fowl, were filling the air with hallelujahs.

I cannot live among these little inhabitants of my village without the conviction that

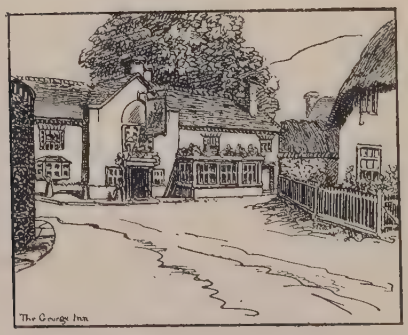
we are indeed neighbours. Like us they live under the law of labour, and work that they may eat. They know the human cares of love and of self-sacrifice for children. Many of them have no mean skill as architects or musicians. It delights me to feel their kinship, to know that the same holy spirit is in us all; that these little beings are even not so far from us as we are below the angels. Even the great solid earth is alive. Surely she dances on her path among the planets, throbbing with attractions and repulsions, bound as we are by duty and by love. In her great sphere are united all the lesser lives we know. Who can say that there is no life in minerals or in the so-called inorganic substances? They all confess the strongest affinities and repulsions. They indeed acknowledge purification by fire, and strive for their ideal of crystal perfection. May it not be arrogant to assume that conscious life is limited to creatures that eat? Is it not too difficult to find that humblest creature in whom it may begin?

I believe that the whole earth lives and knows that it lives; that light and sound

and warmth are vibrations of the universal heart; that seas and rivers and rains and rocks and minerals, all are growing, changing substance embodying the living spirit. It is not difficult to recognise the solemn meditative life of great forest trees that grow calmly through the centuries, and, late every spring, long after little shrubs are fluttering in new greenery, feel the warm sap climb up to their hearts, and are the last in autumn to part with their leafy crowns. Who dares deny their conscious life?

The frail and short-lived flowers that turn their faces to the sun, or others that prefer to bloom at twilight, that close their petals from the rain or shrink when touched, that cling or grow by root and branch to what they need—have these no feeling? We see all visible bodies united to the earth and one with its substance; just so clearly do I see the inner spirit of each united to the giver of life. It is the invisible ray of the spectrum that can penetrate the fleshly matter, and even photograph its inward structure. No logic can penetrate the inner mystery of life, but a ray invisible illumines

the veil of substance. By its light we recognise the energy of the one spirit rejoicing in expression, creating by thought, separate yet united. Those who know this union feel not awe but rather joy and rest, and hear all the voices of Nature shouting Hallelujah!



FRIENDS AMONG LABOURERS

CHAPTER VI

FRIENDS AMONG LABOURERS

ATE, in her harshness, reserves for aged labourers as the closing toil of life a task of peculiar roughness. Those who can no longer hold the plough or tend a flock can at least get employment from the parish on mending highways. In wet and cheerless winter weather very old men are at work trimming hedges, clearing out ditches, or breaking up the big flints deposited in great heaps along the roadside. How often at November dusk after a long day of such work old Sherman gives me a cheerful greeting, as he trudges homeward bending over a stout staff! For ten years past his back has been bent from the hips almost at right angles, and he stands all day, even when breaking stones, to save the pain of rising from a sitting position; but

his lively countenance twists up over his stooping shoulder with no hint of complaint.

It was in summer that I asked him to give me a sitting, and offered two shillings for two hours, which is his usual wage for a whole day. My messenger returned with vague promises, and several times I waited in vain. Finally I myself went to his cottage at supper time; found him just returned from twelve hours' work at rick-building, which he considered much too important to desert for any painting nonsense however well paid. His pretty old wife, who presides over the first hours of many of our babies, was on my side and eager to have his "picture took."

"What be I to do?" said he.

"Only to come in your working clothes and keep awake."

"I'll keep awake well enough if you don't give me something to make me sleep."

"I shall not give you anything but the two shillings, it's quite enough (a laugh); but you can bring your pipe and smoke all the time."

"Oh, I can smoke, can I?" said he, and

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that was what clinched the bargain (for no one can smoke at a haystack)—that he should come to me on the first wet day when there could be no work in the hay-fields. A rainy day was not long withheld, and with it came old Sherman, who found the studio much to his liking. When I had placed him comfortably and lighted his pipe, I took up my brushes and easily kept him talking. Very few of the old peasants have so much to say. Seventy-two years old he was, and remembered all about the machinery riots, when farm-labourers destroyed all the new-fangled farm implements in fear and jealousy of being supplanted.

"But the chinery has done us no harm," said he. "I tells 'em they're a great deal better off now. When I was a child we never had any meat, nor any learning. I've worked every day of my life since I was seven year old. Nobody can say I was ever beholden to any one."

"What work could you do when only seven years old?"

"They gave me the barley to husk and sift. Our pig had the husks, and I can't

understand how he could get fat on it, but he did. We had the barley made into bread —it was all we ever did have—no milk or butter. My father got his glass of beer sometimes. There were no allotments then to grow potatoes, but only room for a few cabbages round the house. I mind now how tired I was sifting that barley, but I kept at it all day until I fell asleep and rolled off the stool, and my mother just carried me up and put me into bed. Sometimes after the harvest, when we had good gleanings, there was a great treat. My mother would get the corn all ground up together, chaff and wheat, and out of that she made a splendid bread. My mother was a powerful needlewoman. I mind when she made a frock for Mr. B. Why, she must have sewed at that all winter. It was stitched fine in patterns. The linen was grand. We never see such stitching now in patterns and gathers work (the old smock-frock). She must have got ten shillings for that."

"Isn't it time you worked a little less? You might have some help from the parish."

Angrily: "I don't want any help, and it's

no good to stop working; it's very bad. I mind when John gave up carrying the letters. He'd been carrying the letter-bag, I guess, fifty year, and just thought he'd do something easier, and he wasn't much older than what I am now, and giving up work just killed him. He died that winter."

"I often wonder," said I, "how our Tom goes that round every day. Of course, he's young; but in eight years since I've been here he never misses a day in all weather, and a heavy bag he carries. It's sixteen miles he walks every day, except Sunday, and besides he's always handy for odd jobs in the afternoon—to help in harvesting, to clean windows, or to play cricket in season."

"Oh, sixteen miles ain't much. Why, John he used to go twenty-four every day, and Sundays too, in those days; but the bag wasn't near so heavy then. Oh, bless you, I don't make the mistake he did. I couldn't do without working; but I don't mind coming to sit with you, ma'am, on rainy days, for my wife do insist it makes my lumbagy worse to be out in wet."

Apparently it had not occurred to him

that sitting with me was work. In time I learned that he is something of a capitalist. He takes as large an allotment as can be got from the farmer and subdivides it, letting it off in sections. Some of our people, it seems, prefer to be his tenant rather than the farmer's.

I questioned him about a very old woman whom I found digging potatoes in a patch a mile from home. Her age and weakness had excited my compassion, though her face created suspicion that any small gift might be spent at the tap-room.

"She's a very queer woman," said he. "Oh, she's not good at all. Why, once her man came home from his work so very tired he thought he'd have a chop. So he bought a chop, and told her to cook it, and he just lay down and fell asleep until it was ready, and when she'd cooked it she saw him asleep, so she ate it herself. Oh, she's a very queer woman!"

What a revelation of the life of the really poor, where the extravagance of a chop is only afforded as a rare stimulant to unusual work.

Among the labouring people there was another old man I came to know well. He supplanted the early boy in my vegetable garden. His figure, six feet high, was erect and very thin; his pale face, etched with countless lines, beamed with gentle contentment. He had been a tailor, and now did only little repairing jobs, for farmers more and more bought shop-made suits. His eyes, too, were failing; no wonder, for he sewed on winter evenings by the merest speck of an oil lamp, an old-fashioned hand-lamp. Candles, when given to him, were considered too precious for use. His cottage was dark indeed, and he longed to work out in the sunshine, so came to me for two days in the week. He took great pleasure and pride in the fruit and vegetables, which began to prosper, and taught me many things about them. Very indignant he was with the artful man whom I even paid for carting away builder's refuse and rubbish, which would have been most valuable in the soil. He took the roof off the goat-shed, which thus became a bin to store vegetable refuse. Other stores he arranged of loam and sand

and leaf mould, in a corner neatly hidden by a privet hedge. He overhauled the chimney-sweep, too, who was carrying away all my precious soot. He taught me that my effort to sift stones out of the borders was most fatal foolishness. The only danger was that he would venture to weed my flower-beds! These I kept strictly to myself; but in my occasional absence his overzeal uprooted all my seedling bracteata poppies in mistake for thistles, and a good number of seedling anemones too. I imagined him really unequal to the heavy work of autumn trenching, and, one day when he was not there, brought in a labourer to do it; but this was a great offence. The ignorant man dug up the bottom spit to the top, so that the earth was completely turned upside down, and nothing would grow in it. For a whole year Mr. Anthony bewailed my want of confidence. Things did grow, but, he being only eighty-two, could not brook my doubt of his strength.

It was easy to see that he understood flowers and plants, and loved them as only old people can. It is not a passion with the

young. We old ones perhaps feel that, ere long, we shall be down under the roots of the flowers, and return to earth, and are already growing a little like them in our vegetating calmness.

The old man's great pleasure was to bring me a fine bunch of grapes from his own vine ripened on the south wall, or a dainty plant of wood-sorrel, an old-fashioned rose or Daphne Mezereum which he had grown for me. His love of flowers was sincere. I am sure during the last years of his life he moved many of his own treasures to my place to make them a new home, and indeed the cabbage rose, the Daphne, or the shamrock always speak of him. There was another garden he took care of, and he did odd jobs of bricklaying for the builders, and a little tailoring. At home sat an aged, helpless wife whom he tended like a child, and all the little household work was done by him. On Sundays, for forty years, he had sat in the chapel of the Primitive Methodists and given out the hymns, but he wore his piety modestly. Had he not saved a marrow of unusual size and asked

to cut this and my white lilies for their festival, I should not have discovered his important position. About quarter-day the old gentleman, dressed in most respectable black, with a silk hat, always set out, staff in hand, to climb the hill and walk six miles to our nearest town, whence he would walk back in the evening not overdone. Sometimes Lady was his companion, and once she brought him a fine hare, which he gave to me. I convinced him, with difficulty, that, the rightful owner of the hare being undiscoverable, he might receive naughty Lady's gift. These long journeys afoot were to collect the rents of some little cottages of which he was landlord. His own landlord is a gipsy basket-maker who likewise visits us, with his little cart full of baskets and brooms about quarter-days. Such scraps of freehold are constantly bought up by working-people, and though it is well for them to own their own homes, I am not sure they make the best landlords. Farm-labourers are very glad to be housed independently of their employer; for when he is also landlord they are often compelled

to accept very hard terms, rather than be turned out of their dwellings.

In winter days it was a pleasure to get the old man to pose in the studio—an excuse to give him work without exposure to cold, and to draw him into those rambles through the long ago that are the best journeys of the aged. His simplicity and dignity always gave me the sense of learning from him. His mind was serene and happy in the smallest things, open to the harmony of the universe in which his own humble poverty seemed to him perfectly natural and right. He was childless and alone, save for the poor childish wife. His brothers had scattered early in life to the Colonies and to the States. One was a bridge-builder and very prosperous when last heard from many years ago. "Why did you not go out also?" "Oh, I was always a great one for my mother—I couldn't leave her alone."

The real difficulties of poor people were revealed to me in a sharp illness that befell him. I had never attempted the visiting of parish work, for I am shy of entering the

houses of the poor except when business or acquaintance warrants; but when I found him pottering about my garden one frosty morning, his face grey and his breathing very difficult, I had no hesitation in insisting that he must go home, and in following to see how he was cared for. There again he was found carrying coals and drawing water to provide a store for days; and when driven upstairs a new difficulty arose, for the old wife would admit no neighbour to do the housework or wait on the patient; to me she had no objection, but no one else must come. It was necessary to impress her with the idea that her husband was really ill and must have care. Then the poor soul fell a-wailing. "I must be anxious," she wailed again, "for if he dies *it's my home*." The poor miserable, selfish creature at last agreed to admit a nurse; but I am not sure that her prejudice was unenlightened, for when the said neighbour in the small room upstairs was being taught how to make mustard poultices, she consoled and encouraged the patient by remarking cheerfully: "It's time you were

breaking up now, Mr. Anthony!" "Oh my poor old girl," he sighed out. When we had left him well sandwiched in warm poultices, the old girl did the worst she could for him. Shaking and tottering she succeeded in locking the door of the street, and had almost reached the top stair when she rolled down to the bottom. The patient had to go to her rescue, and carried her up, and was then so exhausted he could only knock on the wall for his friendly neighbour and throw the key out of window. All this delayed his recovery; but the "old girl" made no further resistance to our good offices, of which she needed full share. Such thin little blankets they had; as old, I guess, as their lives together. I ventured to send a good pair, but it seemed an intrusion; he thanked me stiffly; his wife, he said, felt a great deal of warmth in them—he had been quite warm enough. It was a year later that the old wife died, and her devoted old man, nearly worn out with her protracted failing, was a genuine mourner. He had no longer much use in living, one could see that his little cottage was haunted

with solitude—he could no longer do a whole day's work, but he loved an excuse to come to my garden, or sit in the studio. When the time came for his quarterly expedition he started uphill, but came back to my door to wait for the carrier's waggon, and in that wearisome conveyance made his necessary journey.

It was almost the last time I saw him, for in December I went abroad. At Christmas, a niece came to visit him, and on her departure he walked with her four miles to the train, carrying her portmanteau. A farmer kindly drove him back; but the old man, warmed by previous exertion, was chilled on the drive, and in a few days was gone. The unmarked grave where he rests with the partner of his life seems to me to hold the seed of as fine a spirit as this world can ripen. Though they belonged to the chapel they lie in the fold of the church near the top of the hill. A China rose and a lavender bush mark the place for one who will not forget his example.

Our villagers are not all good. There are black sheep and even goats, and the very

extra worst of these I often noticed in early mornings, driving the village-herd to its upland pasture. The cows took their leisurely way, for the wayside was full of attractions, and but for him they might never climb the hill. He was a poor, tattered fellow, nevertheless, with a certain picturesque air. His hair and beard had a cut after Vandyck, and his ragged jacket was slung over one shoulder in a way that hinted at ideals of style. In grey, sloppy, winter dawns it seemed a miserable duty to accompany those staring cows. Probably Juno, the heifer-eyed, had just their calm unflinching stare, and made foolish people nervous as they do; but if the truth were known it is they who are afraid. I found this out one summer night when Lady and I, having lingered too late on the brow of the hill, came down by a short cut through the fields and within four minutes of home were held up by a cow at a stile. There she stood and stared! Every few minutes I summoned courage to get over the stile and Lady bounded after. Then the Juno-eyed lowered her horns, and we nimbly

skipped back. This sortie and retreat we repeated many times, until I resolved to climb the hill again, and cross the woods to the road, when an old man, who had been gathering turnip-tops while everybody else in the village was abed, came down the path to our rescue.

I gave him a sixpence to drive the cow away. He looked at the money incredulously, turning it over several times, then spat on it, slipped it into his pocket, got over the stile, and suddenly held up both arms, like a cross or signpost, and off ran the cow fast as any deer. This is the most valuable piece of knowledge that was ever acquired for sixpence, and I give it to you free. Your country walks will henceforth be without alarm. Remember only to lift your arms suddenly, straight up from your side to the level of the shoulder, making a letter T of yourself. The most inquisitive cow will bolt.

But I must return to my tatterdemalion who drove the herd in all weathers, and perhaps preferred their stony gaze to that of humans. In summer it probably suited

him well to doze away the warm drowsy hours in some sheltered copse of the common, close to their pasture, until their tinkling assemblage roused him to take them home. Report said that he spent all nights in some lair he had made up there, and nothing in his unkempt appearance belied the suspicion. For food he carried a hunk of something in his pocket, nuts and berries in their season, or a rabbit, if one should run into his hand. He had been a soldier until some slight injury to the right thumb got his discharge and ultimately produced necrosis, so that his hand became useless. Poor fellow! people didn't talk of that, but gave dark hints of his bouts of drinking and unsteadiness at work.

If you had no larder save your pocket, and no bed save in the greenwood, would you not buy the luxury of a seat in an inn and sip many a glass of beer to prolong the rare comfort?

It was a beautiful day in August when I made his acquaintance. The air warm and fresh, the sky miles high, and every now and then a great roar as of thunder boomed

across the cloudless ether. I was trudging uphill with my sketching equipment, when I saw the cow-driver, without his herd, halfway up in advance. After he caught sight of me he stopped often and looked about with a very knowing representation of admiring the scenery, until I reached his level. Then without any reserve he joined me and we walked on together. Now I think of it, let me say that when I have nothing on my shoulder and walk like a lady at large, the rustics pull their forelocks or curtsey, but when the little easel is carried aloft, every labourer is hail fellow, and even this tatterdemalion found it quite natural to join me as we were walking in the same direction. True, he was wonderfully brushed up, and his face still remembered the pump, as did also a water-bottle which was slung across him. The openness with which it was carried as a sort of soldierly equipment said, "*This is plain honest water ;*" it never occurred to me to doubt the contents until this moment, but perhaps I am stupidly unsuspicious. He wouldn't carry water, of course, in a country full of wells, but I hope there

may have been some water in it. He had a cheerful, gay air, and soon told me he was going out for a holiday. "Can't help it sometimes," he said. "When it's like this, so warm and fine, I must take a run. Just hear those guns now,—all the way from Salisbury Plain—I be going to see those guns!" Of course I sympathised in the pleasure of a summer day, and that it was good for every one to have a holiday; that I, too, should need to go away sometimes, only that everything just here is so beautiful, and that my work was really all pleasure. Then I ventured to say that it was pleasant to see him tidy and clean, and, though holidays were good, would it not be better to work regularly and do himself justice in food and lodging? Then, oh then, I got my reply! He told me that he didn't know what work to do, that his hand troubled him and people wouldn't have him. "But that carpenter," said he, "told me to work for you. He said (the carpenter), '*That woman don't know anything, anybody can work for her.*' She asked *me* to cut off the tops of her trees!" It was a fact; two years before, still in the

dark ignorance of city folk, I had sent for the carpenter to pollard a row of limes that darkened my windows. At that time "I didn't know anything!" I ought to have taken this rebuke humbly and not laughed with glee to the discomfiture of my tatterdemalion. I apologise for calling him that, but never knew his real name. I had to confess that town folk were ignorant of country ways, and that I formerly supposed carpenters should saw wood, but since then in a couple of years I had learned many things. "For instance, look at my garden, just see from here how bright it is, and even those patches overhung by the trees are full of flowers. Your country people told me nothing would grow there, but I have studied it and can prove them wrong. So you see even old ladies can learn new things. Now don't you think if you gave as much care to study what you might do, you could find some work suitable?" "Well I would like to work for you, ma'am, now; I would do my best for you if you'll give me a chance." So we agreed that after his outing he should borrow somebody's wheelbarrow, and I would

show him sundry arrangements to make in my garden, and he should have a half-crown for the day, and hopefully for other days after. Poor soul—the barrow was loaned him for me, but in the exuberance of prospective wealth he stopped at the Plough inn while it waited outside. He did not get so far as my garden for several days, and I felt that further employment was not possible. He kept on with the herds for a time. Nobody gave him any friendliness or intercourse, poor soul, and now, long since, he has disappeared from our neighbourhood. I often think of his lame hand—his privations and loneliness—and wish I had been able to help him, scapegrace though he had been.

Then there was the funny old woman who kept bees, and solaced herself with a glass of home-made mead. She lived in a house too big for her, and took lodgers on the lower floor.

So true it is that Satan finds mischief for idle hands! That venerable old dame was so in need of occupation and amusement that she bored gimlet holes in her floors,

and spent many happy hours lying flat on the boards with her eye pressed to the peep-hole, keenly enjoying the dinners and pastimes of her lodgers below.

Is there not something supremely touching in this hunger for society and amusement? Had she lived in a town, it might have been possible for her to see the play from the upper boxes, and how she would have relished the representations of domestic drama! It is hardly fair to the actors to steal one's box or to look in at private rehearsals, and no wonder that her lodgers flitted regularly at Michaelmas. They never told! Each new-comer had to find out for himself. The most marked feature of village life is dread of gossip, and the very few gossips are sternly boycotted. *I* heard of this curious private box, but then it was from a stranger lodging there, who was only a few days with us.

The little children of the village are rosy and strong, and sturdily trudge to school. One little group from a lonely cottage on the top of the hill pass my door every morning. I feel quite flattered when they

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stop to look at the early flowers. The youngest little fellow, barely three years old, one spring morning, little dreaming that I watched from my bedroom window, yielded to temptation and pulled all the daffodils that his chubby arms could reach between the pales of the fence. From that moment I loved the child because he loved my flowers, and I formed schemes for teaching him all my horticultural arts. He was evidently a future gardener! The next time he passed my gate I waited in ambush and said solemnly, "This is the boy who likes my daffodils." He burst into tears and rushed away as if from a wolf's den. Now it had not at all been my intention to scold him, but only to begin an acquaintance on a basis of mutual tastes. Other efforts I made, better planned, but with like result, for at my house he always passed to the farther side of the road, hanging his curly head and looking askance. Once I met him with an offering of beautiful tulips, but he put his fists in both eyes and blindly rushed away. He feared me even bringing gifts. At last I told his sister that if he would come to

speak to me he should have a silver penny; wherefore he was dragged up, a most pathetic little urchin, tears streaming down his cheeks; but as he escaped from the supposed fury with no worse infliction than a silver bit in his chubby palm, he afterwards passed my den with less alarm. In time I even persuaded him to come inside the studio and to be painted, where he posed with patience and determination most admirable. He is not big enough yet to be my gardener, but on Saturdays he gathers leaf mould under the great beeches in the hanger, and brings it down to me in his little box on wheels. He has quite a dozen brothers and sisters, every year a new one, but their little home, once a toll-gate, with its chimney pricked up like a listening ear on the very outline of the sky, does not add to its two small rooms for their accommodation. Only yesterday one of the younger boys stood crying in the road, where I caught sight of him from my breakfast-table. After much coaxing he was able to explain that his big brother would not come to school. I fixed a nosegay of snowdrops in the flabby button-hole

of his jacket and persuaded him to go alone. In the afternoon I met big brother, only a yard high, carrying a jug and a loaf uphill, so I inquired why he had stopped away from school. "'Cause my mother's got a little baby, and I have to take care of her."

Dr. Barnardo's little orphans are boarded among our cottagers, and on arrival at once display the distinction of town manners. They rattle on the fences with a stick, have the curiosity and restlessness of sparrows, and scream even louder. The other day I was peaceably sketching in the field when a couple of these urchins came running uphill on the other side of the hedge to look at a fire of brushwood. They spied me. "Hello," said they, "we were going to see that fire, but we'd rather watch you." "All right, but stop where you are. If you do, some day I will show you the inside of my studio." They consented to remain in the road, but kept up an incessant chirping, in which they revealed that my lay-figure, once discovered standing in the garden, had been endowed by their matron with the full powers of the nursery bogey that carries off

bad boys to mysterious punishment. Now that they know the bogey is only a papier-maché doll, how will their matron keep order? When they at last departed, with more "hellos" and "good-nights," I was fully acquainted with all the events of their lives, and flattered at being preferred to a bonfire. Country-born children are generally very silent, and it is most difficult to get a word from them. Once a girl had a sudden impulse to talk to me. I was painting an old barn when the water was out, and lay in a wide pond before it. A girl of ten years, quite unknown to me, came running out of her cottage across a field, around the pond, and up to where I sat. "My mother's got a boy," was her abrupt announcement. "Well, one must make the best of it," I said; "boys are rough creatures with muddy boots. I prefer girls." The little girl was quite amazed, but hopefully acquired a better idea of the value of girls.

Once I was sketching a mower at work, while his little children, not far off, kept up a continuous chanting sing-song. After a time their words caught my attention.

"Lady, let fall your purse! Lady, pull out your purse! Lady, let fall your purse! Lady, pull out your purse!" When this drowsy bewitchment, which they never learned from Brothers Grimm, had continued long enough, I startled them with: "My purse is at home; I never bring it into the fields." Then the sing-song stopped abashed.

There is a floral service in one of our Church festivals, when the children assemble at the school, each carrying flowers, and come in procession into the empty church, heaping their nosegays on the steps of the choir. It is a pretty custom, and if the children cultivated each his flower or sought for it in the woods it would be more useful. Their practice is to assemble outside my gate, looking into the garden, too shy to ask, but by some enchantment drawing me to inquire what they want, and notwithstanding the firmest determination against cutting my flowers and spoiling the growing picture so carefully planned, I most often weakly gave them many of the best. A small child looks so pretty carrying a tall foxglove

like a torch of light, or a giant poppy for a banner. That is why I cannot help giving them.

Last summer, when we were all so gay in the harvest-field, one of these little ones met a sad fate. On the edge of the hanger, where the loveliest view opens out of the wood, is a tiny cot, and for a well a large dug-out cistern collecting mere surface water. A few decaying boards, once fencing it, are lying on the ground, hidden in rank grass. More than once, coming home from the wood, I have just escaped walking into the well, which would have been more disagreeable from its foulness than its depth. In this cottage a little girl of nearly six years was left in charge of a boy of two, when all their family went to the reaping. The boy, playing at soldier, toddled backwards and fell into the water, and the small girl made every effort to haul him up in the bucket, but again and again the little fellow was unable to keep hold of it. At last the poor girl ran to fetch her parents, who were two miles away, and when they returned the little child, exhausted, had slipped into the shallow ooze

and died. The landlord of this cottage employs many labourers, of whom the coroner's jury consisted, and no fault was found with his neglect to repair. A gentleman landlord would have been severely censured.

Among these rustic figures, old and young, moves the gentle presence of an unconscious saint, not even aware that she does well. Our Vicar, indeed, gives all that care and guidance and kind helpful friendliness that are ever associated with his holy office. The service of our venerable church is rendered by him with dignity and sincerity unsurpassed in any cathedral; but the Vicar's young daughter, having taken no vows, received no ordination, long deprived of her mother's earthly assistance, daily gives her young life to humble rude offices for the service of all who need. Who does not feel the stronger under the calmness of her young blue eyes, that have brought even the naughtiest boys to repentance? To those who are ill she brings courage and experienced nursing, learned for their sake in hospitals. How often has she washed the children and cooked the meals, after tending a helpless

mother? On two or three evenings in the week she trains the choir, and accompanies them with the harmonium on Sundays, besides teaching twice in the Sunday school. In winter she conducts the mothers' meetings and clothing-clubs, reading to them while they sew, and manages also a reading-room for men. Time must be found for domestic duties of the vicarage, where her greatest rest and pleasure is a quiet evening sewing, while her father reads aloud from the big volume of Ecclesiastical History. For the benefit of the schools and repairing fund and entertainment of the village she arranges many concerts and entertainments, and every summer a sale of work. She fulfils also the heavy duties of secretary to the branch of the Girls' Friendly Society, and is daily present at matins and vespers. How many hours do her days contain? Whence comes to her the peaceful contentment that beams in her happy face?

The really great event of our generation was our fire. We date from that. Under the cosy comfort of our straw roofs lurks the fire fiend, ever ready to flash out in fury. For

many generations he had not troubled us, and people forgot the frailty of their dwellings, although new dangers, such as threshing-machines and traction-engines, stalked among us, scattering smoke and sparks. When the thatcher has safely covered the new ricks, and some good straw has been threshed, then he has time to repair the house roofs, and once in ten years to make a whole new thatch. He stands above on an immense ladder, while his boy runs up and down with great armfuls of silvery straw. Deftly and quickly he pins it with strong withes, binds, smooths, trims neatly about the eaves, until it looks like the head of a well-brushed, yellow-haired child. At first it is so close and smooth that sparrows make no attempt to burrow in it; but after the drying and baking of one summer, followed by soaking and freezing of one winter, the little imps can ravel out the eaves and perforate it with their tunnels. The litter of straw that they kick down over the tidy flower-beds is abominable. These holes and openings are all ready to lodge a spark which might glance off from a close surface. Every year the

thatch grows browner and mellower, mossy towards the shade, with a crown of wild asters or cornflowers flourishing in the sun. Every summer's drought and winter's frost pulverises the straw more and more.

One autumn, after a long dry summer, when surrounding fields were reaped and threshing-engines, puffing and panting, were labouring at the ricks, a chance spark from one of these blown over the pretty roofs lodged in some sparrow's nest and crept among the rafters until it burst out with a yell of triumph. A brisk north-east wind brought me a puff of smoke, and I said: "How foolish to burn brush on this windy day." Then a woman came to tell me that it was no brush-burning but a house afire. With others I ran to the centre of the village where a row of connected cottages was already ablaze. The men in distant fields saw the flame and came hurrying home, but women were quick to release ponies and cows and drive them to safer enclosures—they had need to be quick to save anything. Presently all pails were filling and passing from hand to hand, but the wind mocked

us, tossing balls of blazing straw across wide meadows, carrying the torch to stately trees, to dry hedges, and creeping into new thatches, filling the air with dark, horrible smoke. There was something particularly horrible in the voice of the fire. It roared with brutal triumph, pouring stinging smoke into our throats and eyes. Already the farm-house nearest me seemed lost among its burning barns and stables. Fortunately it was tiled; that gave a little more time to save furniture. It was time to think of my own cottage. My maid and I put our clothing into boxes and carried them out together, fortunately with calmness enough to consider the direction of the wind, and make our heap of salvage away from it. People came to help, but I only accepted two whom I knew to be careful, and with their kind aid all my little treasures, even many of most fragile nature, were carried across the road to the middle of a field and protected by blankets. All this time the fire shouted and the smoke stung eyes and throats. All my furniture, except nailed-down carpets, was out, when, hurrah! on the top of the hill

appears our hope, the fire-engine. After galloping five miles they had to descend the hill slowly, though every minute was impatient. In only half-an-hour from the outbreak of the fire, one solid brick farmhouse with all its outbuildings, barns, and newly-gathered harvest was a crumbled mass of flame—a dozen dear little cottages were swept away, that great live oak opposite them still blazed as if in foliage of flame—and the fine barns and outhouses of another large farm were hopelessly involved. Now the engine got to work, and relays of eight men pumping together soon fixed the limit of destruction.

I stood in the grass under the hot noon sun and near the scorching flames. The little heap of my furniture was all safe, and my home unsinged: it seemed incomprehensible that mine should be saved! That the fire should have stopped at my door! Why should I go unscathed? Nerves trembled, now the strain was over, and I was glad to rest on the ground. After a while my servant asked: "Shall we carry the things back?" "No. It will be a good time to

have a thorough house-cleaning—sweep it out well, and we will then put everything directly in its place without confusion. First we can have some lunch."

Then I went down the road, past ruins still steaming under streams of water, to the source of our disaster. Twelve pretty little houses, this morning gay in climbing roses, were shapeless heaps of ruin. In a pasture opposite, the poor inhabitants, in reckless haste and danger, had saved what they could, and now were trying, out of the confused salvage, to gather their own together and reckon their losses. All were homeless, dinnerless alike; prosperous people with a year's profits gone, old helpless people, poor labourers, with many children, were all suddenly dependent on their neighbours. The Vicar was among them, of course, helping and comforting; and others who had a spare room had come, like myself, to offer a lodging. The homeless were people of various degrees, and I was selfish enough to look for a neat guest. A very respectable mother and daughter, not previously known to me, were glad to

accept my hospitality. At the time when this happened I was recently come to the village, and my presence among these little households, all tipped ruthlessly into the glaring sunny field, might be mistaken for intrusion or curiosity, so I returned to my own salvage, and worked for hours to restore order. By tea-time everything was back in its place after an extra good polishing, and only one plate was broken. It was a wonderful escape, for my garden was filled with clumps of burnt thatch, the interstices between fir poles of which the studio is built were quite filled with charred straw, and yet no harm had been done. My next neighbour of the farm who owns the fields around me had placed clothing and beds for safety on the outside of my garden wall, close to the studio, where they were ignited and destroyed. They were unfortunate, too, although the house, being tiled, escaped, because, in moving furniture, they accepted any help that offered. The poor mistress stood wringing her hands and bewailing, while eager assistants, with undirected enthusiasm, pulled tables and chairs to pieces,

and even uprooted a marble mantelshelf. Cows were also to be pitied when they came home to milking, and insisted on entering the familiar enclosures now become charred and smouldering ruins.

We slept soundly that night for the fire-engine remained, giving us confidence until the following evening when every ember was extinguished.

It occurred to me that so great a catastrophe would be announced in London papers, and possibly have a leader in the *Times*, so I telegraphed to a very dear friend to assure her of my safety. Can you believe it? There was not a word about this great conflagration in any one of those omniscient dailies—foreign news in large type, and not a word on the ruin of a Hampshire hamlet!

It was very extraordinary that long after the engine left us a little flame suddenly crept up from the back of a cottage, which had been saved. It had been only slightly injured when the fire had been checked at its neighbour; but the owner had been heard to say that it was a pity, as he would have

liked his insurance. He had not moved back his furniture, and he was very slow in assisting to extinguish this new fire. After this a careful watch was kept all night, though every man was indeed tired.

When the third day came we hoped that at last all danger was over. People had found shelter of some sort; men were at work as usual, and women doing their best in temporary quarters. One family was camped in the harness-room of the vicarage, others in similar places, for there is never an unoccupied cottage in this neighbourhood.

At midnight again, in our heavy sleep, broke the cry of "Fire!" That, indeed, was horrible! In a few minutes everybody was in the street. Contrary to custom, the telegraph had been kept in connection, so the engine was called again, and a cyclist glided down the valley road, in an opposite direction, for another seven miles away. Waiting for help is hard, and this fire, started in an inn yard, might spread in any direction. We now felt sure that malice and arson were lurking among

us, and a very palpable panic possessed us. We stood in the great light, and with blinded eyes peered into the outer darkness, fearing to see other flames—even mistaking rising stars, caught sight of between foliage, for the dreaded signal. One very old man, the richest farmer in the place, and the last ever seen in a smock-frock, got a heavy chest carried out of his bedroom into the road—a chest full of gold, we believe—and sat upon it all night.

But the fire did not spread, the engines both arrived, the mischievous wind slept, and policemen on cycles came to watch. Cool grey dawn soothed the fierce glare of such a night, and in the morning most of of us went home to rest.

After this, for several weeks, a watch was kept all night, but until that was organised my octogenarian gardener insisted on protecting my domain, and paraded the garden until morning, prepared for conflict with the stoutest incendiary. Although I knew that a particular person was suspected, I did not know his name. There was no proof, and perhaps it was only unfounded suspicino,

no one would accuse him openly. I begged to be informed in confidence, and found that it was his mother whom I had taken into my house. Probably it served me right for picking and choosing.

Although the indifference of the London papers had been so surprising, there was ample compensation in the celebrity we attained in Hampshire. On the Sunday after our fire, a swarm of visitors and sightseers came to gaze and wonder. People drove and people walked; one man, accompanied by his family pushed a perambulator seventeen miles! After all, there is some comfort in misfortune that interests distant people.

Alarm and disturbance gradually passed away in the usual tenor of our lives. The crumbled cottages, which were never rebuilt, became picturesque mounds clothed in flowers and tangled creepers. Over the other side of the road appeared a row of neat red-brick houses with slate roofs. The old lady on Windmill Hill sent them climbing roses, and in time their newness and redness was concealed.

The jubilee of our dear Queen we kept as well as we could. The hamlet dressed itself in flags and garlands. A procession was made in which everybody took part, dressed in costumes of the beginning of the reign. Mr. Anthony headed it in an inherited smock-frock—a true old one, elaborately decorated with scrolls of stitching, a top-hat, and a huge nosegay of red and blue flowers. The blacksmith with a real anvil and forge, and other skilled mechanics, were drawn in a great waggon, festooned with flags and garlands. Superior citizens in strange costumes supposed to represent early Victorian days, were mounted on steeds caparisoned in patchwork counterpanes—and very elegant the horses looked! Suitable to the close of the century was a bevy of bicycle girls, with their wheels in garlands. The procession turned at the church, where it had great difficulty in carrying out the manœuvre. The column fell into confusion for a time, but the knights on horseback galloped to and fro, and eventually led it safely to the favourite meadow, where a banquet was provided.

Everybody took part in this grand performance except myself and my dog Lady, who acted as admiring crowd. At night we all climbed the hill, whence we could see, in a circle of the horizon, from Winchester on the south-east to Salisbury on the west, the beacon-fires flame out as in days of old. As for us, we do not play with fire.

HIDDEN TREASURE

CHAPTER VII

HIDDEN TREASURE

N autumn, when corn is cut, I love to go uphill through the stubble. Thoughts always tend uphill when you live at the foot, just as flowers stretch their necks to look over a wall. Therefore, perhaps, I always turn up the hill. It is so steep that you can see only a little piece at a time, either up or down. The crest of it always seems just at the top of the next field, where the big cumuli clouds, riding fast on the west wind, sweep the earth. When you reach that edge you expect to look into the caldron of storms, but instead you will find only another field. Sometimes it is isolated, like a mere island in the air, garlanded with blackberries and clematis, and inhabited by a fold of sheep and their collie. The clouds are always a little beyond. They

recede like the foot of the rainbow. Hope and curiosity lead one upwards by pleasant stages until at last, on the summit, the whole procession of clouds rolls into view, their farthest battalions wheeling up from the Channel.

In autumn fields seem wider, and as they all turn brown under the ploughshare, and leafless hedges take on the same soft tone, the natural configuration of hill and valley predominates. The brown earth and masses of shadow from the low sun enhance the glories of the vaporous sky. Here and there in the hedgerow stands a giant wild rose, covered with scarlet berries and wreathed in clematis, now only a network of brown stems to which its seed-vessels cling, suggesting the ghosts of flowers.

There is one path, very difficult to find, through the tangled mazes of the common, that leads through copses sacred to the nightingale, but now deserted, by pastures anchored in the sky, to a solitary farm on the brink of a wild ravine. Its back is against the hill; grand beeches shelter it from the north, but south and west the

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Art Repro. Co., ph., sc. A Pond on the Common.

earth sinks into a deep, grassy gorge with fine forest trees at the bottom, down into whose tops you may gaze. The farm seems more isolated by this almost perpendicular ravine, its separation is so emphasised, and the vast map of cultivated country spread out below in a complete semicircle is so immensely distant, silent, lifeless.

A narrow drive, rarely used, and an accompanying grassy footpath on the brink of the ravine, lead farther on into level upland country or back to the village by a circuitous route. I often preferred to continue the onward path from here, almost level, yet even in the tangle of nut-woods preserving a curious sense of elevation. Farther on there are three or four scattered cottages, and then another farm, sheltered by spruce trees, distinguished by a bright little pond where geese enjoy themselves, and an old dame sits at her door preparing vegetables.

For the sake of a word with her I ask the way, and praise her poultry and sheltering trees. "But are you not lonely here?" "Oh no, ma'am; it might seem lonely to you, but we don't feel it."

In a cottage seemingly dependent on this farm I made a friend. There are two little dwellings under one roof, mere labourers' cottages with whitened walls and thatch. One of them is uninhabited. A seven-sisters rose covers the wall, and the pollard lime on the boundary has a tea-rose trained around it. Every little nook is filled with flowers. It was not here, however, that I made acquaintance with its old dame, but in my rambles on the common, where, towards the beginning of November, she was often seen engaged in some mysterious business. She pushed a little box set on the wheels of an old perambulator, and she carried a spade. I supposed her to be cutting kindling and bracken, for her cart always carried a load of these home, but I discovered that it came out filled with garden plants. Even roses she brought, with soil specially fitted, and planted them carefully on the sunny side of low copses. There were many other flowers, such as daffodils, foxgloves, anemones, and phloxes, for which she selected suitable little places and made plantations. Sometimes she took

great pains to pick out deep-rooted thistles or docks, which threatened to spoil the pasture. All this care in a vast place of six hundred acres, given over to cows and rabbits, struck me as almost evidence of madness; and when I looked into her face, alert and keen, and heard her few words elegantly spoken, it was impossible not to recognise a lady, notwithstanding toil-disfigured hands and coarse dress. Her very occupation or amusement proved her gentle birth, for farmers' and labourers' wives leave gardening to their men. She looked an active, hale woman of sixty odd, but was really much older, usually bareheaded, with thin grey hair smoothly braided, and dressed in rough grey serge skirt and jacket. She had certainly no beauty of appearance, but there was an unconscious dignity in her manner, and her words were spoken with distinction.

At my request she gave me a piece of the phlox she was wasting on the common, and showed me how to cut up the stalk in sections of two buds, so as to obtain a large stock of plants.

"They should strike fairly well now," she

said; "but if you do not succeed with them, come for some more in the spring, when the young shoots must be thinned, and will surely grow."

Such a quaint recluse might be expected to feel shyness; but instead, as if she had found in me an understanding spirit, she invited me to look at some treasures on the other side of her cottage. Here we came again on to the steep hillside, which makes cultivation so difficult, but the old lady had turned it to wonderful account. The declivity was cut into low terraces, forming a series of steps or paths, with a low rough wall on the upper side. They had been irregularly faced with big flints, so common on our downs, and the interstices planted with tiny Alpines. For the most part the wall was really double, with sufficient space between for occasional wide ledges filled with deep soil.

In some places good blocks of sandstone had been procured for the Alpine Androsaces, gentians, and saxifrages, that cannot live on cold flints or chalk. Occasional projections made shady recesses for auriculas, hepaticas,

cyclamens, and campanulas, but most of the flowers were sun-worshippers, for whom the south-west aspect was well fitted. From the lowest terrace a crimson rambler rose sprawled its branches over the short turf below. Androsaces and geums were still covered with whirls of feathered seeds, but most of the rock-plants were making fresh foliage preparatory to their spring display.

"When winter comes can spring be far behind?" This line is always in my mind in autumn, for one sees that it is the new growth of spring which has pushed off the old leaves. Creeping Alpine phloxes of several kinds filled each its little shelf with evergreen trailing branches almost moss-like, promising to become in spring a mass of pink or white blossoms. Silenes made their prickly hard cushions of rich green, and many sorts of Alpine pinks contrasted pleasantly their grey spiky foliage with flatter leafage. There were sedums of rare kinds, and curious little cobweb houseleeks, which birds are always pecking for the supposed spider. The great saxifrage aretioides grew from many chinks in the wall, and spread back its oxidised

silver leaves, clinging firmly to the stone. She had brought this herself from the Pyrenees. Even in winter the foliage of all these is beautiful, and no plants show such a mass of flowers in their season. Among them many small bulbs and orphris were invisible at that time. Bordering the wide paths room was spared for a few great herbaceous plants, which would look, in their summer growth, like forest trees among their little relations. In rougher places were bushy sun-roses and lemon thyme, veronicas, fragrant southernwood, and sweet basil. A few native junipers and hawthorns marked the boundary of the little domain, altogether a fairy garden, which no other plants could have filled with such great variety.

The old lady beamed and expanded with delight at my appreciation, and pointed out her many treasures with some references to the way she obtained them.

"The Androsaces, ten years ago, came by post from Switzerland; the geums too. This lovely variegated aubrietia was a scrap from a wonderful garden in Surrey. One of its little thread-like branches taken off and planted in

autumn by spring had grown to a spreading circle of pale green and white shell-like clusters, covered with violet blossoms. The tiny hepatica, whose downy leaves are fading, is most precious. It was a friend's thought from the Riviera." Almost every plant was associated with some absent friend, most often separated by the whole space from heaven to earth; and these many links with the greater world made the old dame, in her lonely cottage, a most surprising figure.

She bestowed many precious scraps upon me as our acquaintance continued, teaching me their cultivation. "Every bud is eager to grow," she said; "not only seeds, but every fragment that contains a bud has power to become an individual life. Everything seems so eager to live that I cannot but help them to their chance.

"Seedlings take root best under their parent plant; but if allowed to remain there all would perish of overcrowding. When roses are pruned in summer I put their cuttings in sheltered nooks, and in a year's time find them vigorous bushes. The miraculous gift of life, a sacred impulse from God's own

spirit—perhaps rather a part of His spirit clothed in this wonderful garment of visible forms—is in all these, and demands my service. At this season I must find the young plants new homes, for my little garden cannot hold them. Many of them I take to the common, where there are beautiful fit places. Of course the villagers like a few. I hope you will keep some of my nurslings, for it is pathetic to let a bud wither without enjoying its destiny. I am compelled to find places for them to grow in, and therefore my little terraces have climbed down the ravine. Even sheep can't pasture in this steep place, and no one disputes my usurpation. Shall I live to grow with them down to the bottom of the hill and the little stream of water? How lovely bog iris and rushes would look there!"

"But how do you water this place in our summer droughts?"

"That is very easy! There are my waterworks close to the cottage, a row of old oil barrels connected with pipes and fed by a trough to the pump, which is luckily higher. Water must stand to grow tepid, for it is ice cold from the well. A short

bit of hose can spray all the descending ground, penetrating quickly through the stones, none of it is lost. These very little plants, resembling moss in their stature, have roots that reach to a great depth, clinging to the moist side of a stone far below the touch of frost or drought."

Closing night alone put an end to our flower talk, and left me belated on my homeward walk. I took the longer road, because it was, at least, impossible to lose it, winding round the edge of the hill, gradually descending to the village three miles away. Night in this country begins in the valleys. They are blotted in shadow and mist, while the hill-tops still glow in sunset. Returning home was going down, down into vague shadows and silence.

No one could tell me much about my strange acquaintance, save that she had lived there twenty years, always alone. In the beginning she was a great invalid, and the doctor used to visit her until she settled his account and declined further medicines. He really couldn't understand why she lived, seeing that she had an incurable organic

trouble all those years. He had heard say she was an ambassador's daughter.

The parson had newly come to our church, and had never heard of her—thought she went to chapel. The postman said her name was Venusti, but she had very few letters. His father, who used to carry the mails, remembered that when she first came half the bag was often for her, but now only once in a while, one with a foreign stamp. He guessed she was really rich; one of those queer misers probably that keep bags of gold under their flower-beds. He had seen her digging there! He once had a glimpse inside her windows when there was a light upstairs, and "it was full of gilding and grandeur. She was never known to give anything, except sometimes a climbing rose (that didn't cost her a penny!) which she gave to people that lived in new red-brick cottages with slate roofs. No, she never gave any money, though it was easy, with all her miserly ways, to see she was a lady." The rustic mind has a most extraordinary conviction that gentility and wealth are inseparable.

As time went on I was admitted to the companionship of this solitary being. Winter and summer she was always found sitting among her plants, and never with any expression save of serenest happiness. She would not acknowledge any sense of loneliness. The days were too full of work and thoughts. Sometimes a storm would drive us indoors. As in all simple cottages the kitchen was entered directly, and it was only remarkable for the simplicity of its equipment. My friend did all her cooking in a *pot-au-feu* of earthenware standing in a saucepan full of water. There it simmered for hours when there was a fire, needing little attention, and always ready. Eggs, milk, and bread formed her chief food. A pretty sherraton sideboard, with some blue china plates and bowls, and a little corner cupboard full of choice cups, deserved better surroundings.

On the floor above was her small bedroom under the eaves, and in front a sitting-room. This was indeed daintily ornamented. On its low white walls hung some exquisite old Italian mirrors richly carved and gilded.

Some tiny oil pictures, by a distinguished hand; they were, in fact, suggestions of pictures by her husband. There were Chippendale spindle-legged chairs and tables, a bookcase, and a gilded harp. A beautiful Florentine carved cabinet on a strong table, Bokhara rug-carpet and silk chair-covers, cushions and curtains, strange to say not much worn or frayed. Mrs. Venusti seemed in her place sitting erect in the stiff arm-chair, and these pretty things were easily seen to be links with a past luxury into which I dared not inquire.

There was nowhere a trace of hidden wealth, but this old furniture was evidently fondly saved and polished rather for old associations than for its intrinsic value. But for the precious touch of vanished hands or shadowy reflections in the dark little mirrors of faces long ago passed beyond sight, she would probably have exchanged these furnishings for useful cash.

On one occasion we were drenched by a sudden storm. She gave me shelter in the cottage, and while our wet frocks were drying found ancient garments for a change.

Most masquerading gowns they were. I wore a pale-blue silk of the hoop-skirt period, immensely wide and much frilled, with flowing angel sleeves. The sun-browned old lady, with her straight grey hair, was no better suited in a magnificent brocade of even earlier period, which her mother had worn at a Roman festival. It seemed appropriate to move out the harp, which she touched as though a daily pleasure. The strings responded as if an echo of the winds sweeping her hillside, and gradually calm, solemn notes called to each other out of the confusion, at last uniting in strong chords and conquering peace and harmony.

The revival of the past made me bold to exclaim: "Do you never miss the world? Do you never return to your place in it? How can you live cut off from all society?"

"Foolish child," she said, "don't you see how very happy I am? Once I enjoyed life among people — not only friends, who are all gone now, but all sorts of people, especially strangers — just because of the pleasures of discovery. That has been lived

through—finished! Here is another life, full of compensations. Imagine the worry of punctuality in a busy world! It is the very bane of existence. Take a long summer day and divide it conventionally by luncheon, tea, dinner, and fill all the intervals with engagements fitted in; there is only small change of time left. In this solitude a day is a part of eternity; I never have to eat unless for hunger, which is soon satisfied; and whatever I love to do can be quietly finished. Civilisation is impossible without that one word, punctuality, but what a misery it is!"

"But how can you amuse yourself? Perhaps you are writing books under an assumed name: you seem like one who is somebody we ought to know."

"No, I write no books, nor even read them. I need nothing, nothing at all, but to rest here, looking over the wide valley and the clouds. When quite alone I hear the planets sing."

The time came when, staggering under the burden of mere worldly trouble, I besought this calm, happy soul upon the

hill-top to give me her secret of peace, and then the history of her later life was simply told to show me the use of trials.

"Once I took my troubles," she said, "even worse than you do. It seemed, if there really were a just Divinity, He should give His creatures happy, prosperous lives. Why create us merely to struggle for a living, to bear sorrow-broken lives, separation, and death? When my husband was taken, the evidence of divine cruelty was completed for me. I lived, then, among clever, intellectual Agnostics, all proudly demanding scientific proofs of the intangible. Can you even prove life? What is life? This little piece of flower-stalk thrown away, trodden under foot, if it falls in fit soil will take hold of the earth and live rejoicing in leaf and flower. Why does this little bud in the axil of the leaf contain the plan of the whole plant and the secret germ of life to force it into growth?

"There is no explanation of the mystery, but it is a fact, and these humble weeds have revealed to me the source of life.

"Poor child," she continued, "whatever

happens to us is of no consequence, none at all. The only thing that is of consequence is the way we bear it. You may use this trial to lift your soul a step higher; even though the flesh perish, it is nothing if the soul is strengthened."

"Soul indeed!" said I, "all I ask is to perish utterly and have rest," for I was very troubled and could see no end of it.

"My friend," she said, "joy and sorrow are alike transitory. The only lasting impression which either can make is a little furrow ploughed into our souls, where God will sow the good seed. That we may keep to eternity!"

I responded that to live for ever was my horror—let me perish utterly and rest.

"I, too," she replied, "once lived under that blight. You shall hear how the cloud lifted. Early in life I became a childless widow. The cruelty of that double bereavement embittered my heart. Thenceforth in all the universe I could recognise only suffering—pain of millions of sensitive beings created only to be tortured. The accumulated sorrows of this vast multitude

overwhelmed me. To my imagination, each individual had to bear the whole burden—all the suffering of the world—and rather than think that a God could thus afflict His creatures, I took refuge in the doubts of Agnosticism and believed in creation by accident or evolution, and gladly anticipated the rest of annihilation. This was all the easier, because so many of the intellectual people among whom I lived showed a lofty contempt for those who believed what could not be proved. Years ran on. I got used to my widowhood, and had a pleasant occupied life in cultivated society, enjoying books, plays, pictures, and talk, and caring nothing for mysteries that could not be explained.

"My husband was Italian, and his kindred I cared not for. My only sister married in Austria, for, you see, we grew up while our father was in the diplomatic service. When I found myself alone I hungered for England, an England never seen, but always called home—so in England and in London I lived the best of my years. Before many had passed, a bank failure involved my

moderate fortune; all save one small investment was lost. I made a brave struggle to conceal my disaster, to live still among my own kind and live on my wit, visiting from one house to another, being carefully agreeable that I might be wanted, turning and remaking my fading finery, to follow not too far behind the fashion, when at intervals I lodged in some cheap suburban neighbourhood for repairs. Oh, how vain it was! How I loathe the memory of it! At last my income was diminished to only £50. I then happened to be visiting at the Park about ten miles from here. On one of our afternoon drives I saw this cottage and persuaded my great friend to sell it to me. He has so many estates that never since has he driven this way nor at least discovered who lives here. An artistic whim he thought it, like his own fancy to possess a bit of useless ground somewhere on the Rockies. Here I brought my scraps of household treasures, glad to hide my disaster from pitying eyes. Even then there was a greater pinch to come, —when my little income was withheld by the solicitor who had managed my affairs, in

order to pay his business charges—amounting to more than £100. Oh, it was perfectly just. There was nothing to complain of, also nothing to live on. A few trinkets, a watch chain, a little silver sent to a London shop brought me a paltry £15.

"Now I found myself in the position of the humblest, worse off even than the labouring man, for there was no work I could do. I watched the women going to the fields to weed and hoe, and envied them, but had not the courage to ask for such employment, besides coarse aprons and rough hats like theirs were not in my wardrobe. The need of daily bread became absorbing, but still I hoped somehow to find the way to earn it. More precious money was wasted in obtaining newspapers and in answering advertisements. There were many most adroitly worded, promising on receipt of a postage-stamp information of certain employment which any lady could do at home. The next letter invariably required a small sum to pay for sample of work. One of these, costing half-a-crown, proved to be a rubber address stamp with instructions to canvas,

for orders. There being about a hundred people, mostly working folk, within a couple of miles of this place the idea was ridiculous. A few similar experiments brought me in sight of an empty purse.

"Then I felt the helplessness of gentle birth, of education in unmarketable accomplishments, of cultivated pride that forbade asking help, of intellect that knew not how to pray.

"Is it not a strange thing that our souls are sent on their earthly journey yoked to the body, a mere beast of prey? The soul must use its uttermost power and intelligence to keep the creature fed. Many a poor soul has time for nothing else, no time to look abroad or sing hymns to the glory of God—and yet this bondage to the hungry beast is apprenticeship for the service of heaven.

"When I thought of this dreadful hungry body, and knew my inability to do anything to support it, I really became terribly ill from mere fright. I spare you details of disease which made me absolutely unfit to be a governess—(that first and only resource of once educated women)—even if my education

of long ago had been up to modern standards. All I could hope for was to escape from my wild beast—out of the world—out of life; but though my physical suffering became intense and no food nourished me, yet I could not die. Poison tempted me—only the certainty of the horrid coroner's jury barred that way—and the publicity that their verdict would reach my few and distant relatives and inflict some injury on a younger generation. For their sake I forbore. Why did I not ask their help? Well, I knew them all to have very moderate means, only just enough; why burden them? It was many years then since we sisters had grown up and parted, and their children I had never seen. I am still supposed to be living suitably to our birth. I thought of a better plan to escape. I decided to walk to nowhere; if I could reach full fifty miles away probably I should die of exhaustion, and no coroner would then find poison, or recognise me, and I could be buried where I died; but I was so exceedingly weak and often in such agonising nervous pain that I could not set out. My little store of money diminished

to a few shillings, and just then came wedding cards from a Parisian acquaintance. Heavy cards both for church and wedding-breakfast enclosed fashionably in double envelopes, and posted with only a home stamp so that I had tenpence to pay, more than allowed for a whole day's food. Such things often happened until my acquaintance kindly forgot me. They seemed to satirise my poverty.

"It was winter then, and for the first time in my life I had no servants. I had no idea of cooking even if there were things to cook, so I lived on milk and bread, and soon there would be none of that. Despair forced me down, despair even of escape by death, despair at last forced me to my knees.

"It was here on this hillside that I cast myself to earth and meant to pray for deliverance, for money, for health, but somehow in my *first* prayer, the involuntary cry of my heart, was: 'O God, teach me to bear it.' That was all.

"I must have lost consciousness until surrounding objects came back as in a dream,

looking calm and bright as they do to one recovering from illness. Little things close at hand absorbed my gaze, while the great anxiety was effaced. Have you not known this happen in the most intense crisis of grief? When it seemed impossible, unendurable, has it not suddenly, mercifully fallen into the background, while little trifles of no consequence were illuminated almost as if by limelight?

"Close to my face was a mat of little leafage every day trodden underfoot unnoticed, but now my eye followed with delight the ogee contours of the leaves, and found this few inches of sod filled with several growths, each invented with lavish beauty and variety. As I grew more awake the atmosphere of peace still enveloped my senses. I no longer thought of myself as struggling against the difficulties of life, but rather as one floating on a swinging tide and caring not which way it drifted. I felt the individual in me no longer predominant, but rather a pleasant sense of being merely part of the whole. The importance of life or death faded into a sense of existence which seemed apart

from either. My first prayer had been answered, nothing had been changed in my circumstances, but I had been taught to bear them, and united to the soul of the universe.

"Of course I have not told you this for any reason except to comfort you by showing what depths one can touch, and that one can find peace even at the bottom. There is no argument or logic or reason that can convince us of religion. It must always, to each one of us mortals, be his separate revelation.

"The new peace was wonderful, heavenly. Fear was gone for ever. I now knew that between death by starvation or by disease there is really no difference. Pain is the gatekeeper of every road for all who depart. Then I learned that poverty and hunger, dispensed to so many, must also be good for me. From the moment of that prayer a new life began, or perhaps the new life wrought by these tribulations had made prayer at last possible. When your heart speaks to God, and sees His hand in all that is, there is no longer anything wrong

in the universe; I no longer thought that the world should be made to fit me, but, instead, my little thread seemed perfectly woven into the great pattern of the whole, helping to make what Goethe calls

'Die schwebende Kleider der Gottheit.'

"My foolish pride, too, was broken. There was one dearest friend from whom my misfortunes had been so far dissembled, the more easily because of her temporary absence abroad. I wrote to her confessing my helpless position, and was made to feel that I had conferred a favour by asking aid. Her love gave courage and life, and has filled these many years with richest happiness. For two years she provided all my wants until the solicitor's bill was paid, and by that time I had learned to feel well off with my little income of £65.

"Many a working-man has not so much to support a large family, and I have all the luxuries of the leisured class;—time to think, and always a vase of flowers for my dinner-table. I am as happy as the day is long. That season of suffering, torture of bodily

pain, agony of breaking pride, were all necessary for my hardened heart, to teach me that simple prayer for submission. What right have we to ask for more than daily bread? Be satisfied in all things to live from day to day, and to recognise the Giver."

This generous revelation of her inward life gave me fresh courage in my own difficulties, and infinitely endeared to me the strong solitary woman. More and more my rambles tended to the house on the rock.

In this intercourse my garden love also increased with great comfort and refreshment to my spirit. The ancient myth of the giant whose strength failed when he was lifted out of touch with his mother, the Earth, is true of many in these later days. In waning years, especially, we need this contact with the Earth, in whose secret breast all visible forms are resolved and revived. Many an hour do I waste pottering about my garden. Even in winter, when all the herbaceous plants are cut off, or rather living in the dark underworld, I

look at their bare places and dream visions of the glories of July, when they will rise again in all their beauty.

Perhaps I enjoy them most at that season, feeling the great contrast of the inner and outer vision. To the bodily eye are presented only bare soil and leafless sticks, while to the spirit the full splendour of perfect summer is revealed. Among these idle meditations eager worldly cares at last find no admission. Peace and joy of creation regain mastery over rebellious humanity, and the unity of all life pulses through us. But oh! there is only one drawback for me in the life to come, I can't sing. Will there be nothing for poor artists to do? Nothing to make? Only angels could shape a flower, but I should like something to make—if only a slug!

In full time, happily saved from slow stages of decay, the solitary rock-dweller passed into silence.

A letter addressed to the Vicar was found tacked on her bedroom door. It had been written many years before, and simply begged him to inform certain relatives, people of

important position in another country, of her death, and bequeathed to the Church in trust her little cottage and her source of income, to keep as a home for a poor lady. She made this bequest with the hope that the blessing she had found in this humble place would always abide with the dweller on the rock.

Before a new-comer arrived (for poor ladies are not difficult to find) I took one evening the customary path, hoping to spend a last solitary hour in the scene of this long hermitage. The wicket was unlatched, and from beyond the cottage came sounds of pick and spade. Two sturdy ploughboys were ruthlessly breaking down the loved rock-garden, scattering its treasures to perish in the dry air, wantonly wrecking, destroying the place so fondly cultivated. The shock overcame me; I sank on the ground, and hid my face on my knees in a flood of tears. The young clodhoppers stood amazed.

When I recovered composure I gathered the poor torn plants and roots, that seemed to me living wounded beings, while the boys

looked on dumb and puzzled. To them these fairy saxifrages and Alpines were mere weeds to be trodden underfoot, and the object of their delving was the miser's hidden treasure.

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THE END

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The End.

THE END

AREWELL, little cottage in the happy valley. Already am I far from your peaceful shelter. This last good-bye I write to you from the deck of an ocean steamer, in January, looking over pathless waters. Cold and restless, and relentless they seem; and, far beyond them, in my mind's vision, lies the little deserted garden deeply covered in snow. There, painfully clear, are the footprints of starving birds. Robins, larks, thrushes, blackbirds, finches, and even sparrows, are running to and fro from the studio to the cottage, saying, "*Where is she? Where is the bread-giver?*"

I am glad the flowers were covered in their little beds and that I stole away while they slept.

Only a few days ago there was to be a dinner-party in London, and a meeting of the Society for the Propagation of Æsthetic

Patrons (only they didn't call it quite that), at both of which I should have been present, but, just before, over fields and roads and garden, a heavy snow fell. All around my cottage the sunrise showed intricate patterns of little birds' footprints, large and small hieroglyphics distinctly spelling hunger and despair. I wired that a block of snow made the roads impassable. It was only a white lie. I stopped to feed the birds and, even so, one little greenfinch, not so strong as the others to fight for his share, died of hunger. In town, the meeting for æsthetic purposes dispersed in gas, and the dinner-party came to naught in an impenetrable fog, while I, in frosty sunshine, kept open house for Robin, and was glad.

The unit or measure of affection is to me my tame robin. Though he outweighed the attractions of London, when my mother's message was put in the balance, he was only a feather.

Thus am I returning to my mother and my mother-country. There, in the streets, the electric trolley will screech as it flies with a flash along the overhead electric wire.

In the hall will be a telephone whereby we shall talk to friends, and others, whenever they summon. If we do not go to hear what they have to say they will rattle until we must. By the blessing of steam-pipes every room will be at midsummer temperature. Kind friends will compliment each other lavishly by sending sheaves of most perfect roses in midwinter, when they cost at least a dollar apiece.

In the happy English valley already the surveyor has marked out the levels for a light railway, scarring the hillside hitherto moulded only by autumn rains. The engine sparks will doubtless set fire to our thatched roofs and ricks; but what matters it? They have an enterprising builder and plenty of corrugated iron and slates. People must have progress, and some think the village will become quite a centre of industry, with a saw-mill, and milk and eggs sent to market.

Dear village! I am glad to have known you in your ancient repose, as you have lived these nine hundred years! During all those centuries, through the portal of the

same beautiful church, your children have been guided into the way of peace! Farewell, honest fields, that yield your recompense to toil! Farewell, dear little garden, that has blushed responsive to my love! Farewell, dear hillsides, that held us as in the hollow of a hand!

With you were days of peace. With you my spirit grew through winter's rest and summer's light, finding the source of peace and light unending.

THE END

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